

I hope that you will not be offended by the fact that I considered it necessary to openly and honestly express my opinion and the opinion of my colleagues on the issues raised in your message.

Tensions in relations between the allies increased even more.

! Churchill W. Decree. op. pp. 427-429.

304

la, when the Soviet leadership was convinced that in 1942 the front in Europe would not be opened. At the same time, information was received in London about a sounding allegedly undertaken by German diplomacy with the aim of concluding a separate peace with the USSR. There was a real threat of a crisis in the relations of the allies. In order to prevent it, the British Prime Minister W. Churchill took an unprecedented step - he went to Moscow. The timing was not right for this. On the eve of Churchill's arrival in the Soviet capital, enemy troops captured Krasnodar and launched a powerful attack on Stalingrad. On August 12, the British Prime Minister arrived in the Soviet capital, and negotiations began immediately. As expected, the main issue was the opening of a second front in Europe.

From the memoirs of W. Churchill:

"I immediately began with the question of the second front, declaring that I wanted to speak frankly and would like Stalin to also show complete frankness ... The British and American governments do not consider it possible for themselves to launch a major operation in September ... However As Stalin knows, they are preparing for a very large operation in 1943. To this end, dates have now been set for the arrival in the United Kingdom of a million American soldiers at their assembly point in the spring of 1943, which will amount to an expeditionary army of 27 divisions, to which the British government is ready to add 21 divisions. Almost half of these troops will be armored troops. So far, only 2.5 American divisions have arrived in the United Kingdom, but large shipments will be made in October, November and December ...

Stalin; whose gloomy mood by this time had increased considerably, said that, as far as he understood, we could not create a second Front with any large forces and did not even want to land six divisions. I replied that this is how it is. We could land six divisions, but their landing would do more harm than good, because it would greatly damage the big operation planned for next year. War is war, but not recklessness, and it would be foolish to bring about a catastrophe that does not benefit anyone ...

305

Stalin, who began to behave nervously, said that he had a different opinion about the war. A person who is not willing to take risks cannot win the war. Why are we so afraid of the Germans? He cannot understand it. His experience shows that troops must be tested in combat. If you do not test the troops in battle, you cannot get any idea of \u200b\u200bwhat their value is ... "".

The atmosphere of the negotiations became more and more tense, and then Churchill played his main trump card, informing Stalin, on conditions of complete secrecy, of the plan for Operation Torch - the landing of the allies in North Africa. The Soviet leader quickly assessed the military and political prospects of this operation and ultimately recognized its expediency. "At this moment, Stalin, apparently, suddenly appreciated the strategic advantages of Operation Torch," Winston Churchill recalled. He listed four major arguments in her favor. First, it will hit Rommel from the rear; secondly, it will intimidate Spain; thirdly, it will cause a struggle between the Germans and the French in France; fourthly, it will put Italy under direct attack. This remarkable statement made a deep impression on me. It showed that the Russian dictator quickly and completely mastered a problem that had previously been new to him. Very few living people could understand in a few minutes the considerations over which we have struggled so persistently for several months. He appreciated all this with lightning speed. But the very next day, Stalin again brought down a number of reproaches on Churchill, accusing the allies of being "too afraid to fight the Germans"? Despite this change in Stalin's mood, the visit of the British Prime Minister made a great contribution to the development of allied relations and made it possible to avoid a very possible crisis. Moreover, the information and impressions received by Churchill in Moscow

. Churchill W. S. 511-512. ? There.  
pp. 515-516.

306

no doubt about the determination of the Soviet leadership to continue the struggle.

In the most difficult period of the war for the anti-Hitler coalition, they managed to overcome the doubts that had arisen in their relations with each other. The coalition continued to grow stronger. The volume of deliveries to the Soviet Union expanded - in comparison with 1941, it increased by more than eight times. In 1942, the USSR received more than 2,500 aircraft, 3,000 tanks, about 719,000 cars, alloyed metals, aluminum, radio equipment, hydroacoustic devices, gasoline, food, footwear as Lend-Lease deliveries. and etc.'. By the autumn of 1942, the Soviet government had established diplomatic relations with Canada, Australia, Cuba, and with the exiled government of the Netherlands. Of particular importance was the agreement signed in

July 1942 with Czechoslovakia, on the basis of which the formation of national Czechoslovak military units began in the USSR. In September 1942, a joint communique was signed between the government of the USSR and the French National Committee (FNC), which determined the joint position in the fight against Germany and its allies. The support of the "Fighting France" movement and the desire previously declared by the Soviet government "to see France free and capable of once again taking its place in Europe and the world as a great democratic anti-Hitler power" played a major role in strengthening the positions of General de Gaulle and his supporters. In November, in Moscow, representatives of the command of the Red Army and "Fighting France" concluded an agreement on the participation of a French aviation squadron in combat operations on the Soviet-German front. In April 1943, the pilots of the Normandy squadron made their first sorties, operating in conjunction with the Red Army Air Force.

The diplomatic successes achieved in 1942 created a solid foundation for realizing the powerful potential of the states of the anti-fascist coalition. It was in 1942 that Tsial managed to throw this poten on the scales, after which the outcome of the struggle was actually already predetermined.

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 1.S. 421.? There. S. 453.

Part of GU

BEGINNING OF RELEASE

The events of the second period of the war received in Russian historiography a stable definition of a "radical turning point" in the course of the Great Patriotic War. This assessment has not changed so far. She successfully survived the perestroika transformations, when the outlook on the course of the war underwent radical changes. And there are good reasons for this. Indeed, the most important events of the period - the defeat of the German troops at Stalingrad, a series of victories of the Red Army on the Don, a large-scale retreat of the Wehrmacht from the North Caucasus, the Battle of Kursk and, finally, the withdrawal of Soviet troops to the Dnieper - in their totality led to irreversible changes. pits during the war, in its course it irreversibly turned to the west, the Liberation began. |

As the key problem of this chapter, it is proposed to consider a number of issues related to the radical change on the Soviet-German front. First of all, how and why did the command of the Red Army manage to turn the tide of events at the point of maximum tension - in Stalingrad? What role did the mistakes and miscalculations made by the command of the Wehrmacht play in this? No less important for understanding the prerequisites and essence of the radical change is an attempt to look at the events of the autumn of 1942-spring of 1943. as part of a single process. In this regard, the question arises of how the accumulated military-technical potential was used, how justified was the decision to

Vetskaya Headquarters on the simultaneous conduct of strategic offensive operations on several sectors of the front at once. And what were the reasons for the unsuccessful offensives of the Soviet troops in the western and northwestern directions? When studying the course of the Battle of Kursk, it is advisable to post

308

raise the question of the reasons for the heavy losses of the Red Army during this battle and subsequent failures in building on the success achieved. The totality of the questions posed makes it possible to determine the content of the key problem of the chapter — how did the Soviet military-political system manage to realize the potential of the country and ensure a turning point in the confrontation at the front and rear? What were the features of this process? By the end of 1942, the tension in the confrontation on the Soviet-German front reached its climax. It was at this point that long-acting factors began to have their full effect. The Soviet economy had finally completed the process of evacuation and militarization of production, and an ever-increasing flow of new equipment began to flow into the army. The allies in the anti-Hitler coalition, after a long period of coordination, began coordinated actions. Deliveries under Lend-Lease had an ever more tangible effect on Soviet production and on arming the Red Army with modern equipment. The ever-increasing influence of these factors became the background of the turning point at the front. After the disaster at Stalingrad and the defeat at Kursk, the Wehrmacht was never able to fully restore its combat capability and even partially reach the level of combat power that it had in 1941. During the same period, the most important events took place in the west. In Africa, large military forces of the allies were landed, six months later the combined Italian-German grouping ceased resistance. Building on this success, the Allies landed in Sicily. Germany received another front in the west, which seriously hampered the actions of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front. In a word, the general situation on the fronts of the world war in late 1942 and early 1943 greatly contributed to the new large-scale offensive of the Red Army and the successful completion of the radical change. However, the course of events on the Soviet-German front turned out to be very contradictory. The Red Army not only won impressive victories, but also suffered heavy, sometimes difficult to explain setbacks and failures, its liberation march was still very uncertain, it clearly lacked firmness. And in this need

309

The significance and inconsistency of the liberation process that had begun also fully manifested the essence and features of the Soviet military-political system.

SPACE OPERATIONS, 42nd: TRIUMPH  
AND FAILURE

In the autumn of 1942, Stalingrad became the place of maximum effort on both sides. From the operational-tactical point of view, the German army, having reached the Volga, had already solved the main tasks of a breakthrough to Stalingrad - the city as an industrial center was destroyed, the most important Soviet communication line along the Volga was interrupted. Further battles, especially under such conditions, when the Wehrmacht was losing its main advantage in maneuver, became meaningless. But for some time, for the enemy, the capture of Stalingrad became a matter of prestige - to refuse to completely capture it meant to admit that here, on the banks of the Volga, the Wehrmacht faced an enemy stronger than him. It was tantamount to psychological defeat. To recognize the enemy as stronger meant to deprive oneself of the feeling of superiority, on which, in fact, the entire German army and its command rested in the first place.

The command of the Red Army also made every effort to hold the city. However, unlike what happened in Stalingrad itself, where units of the 62nd Army V.I. Chuikov mastered new defense tactics, these attempts were made in accordance with the previous scheme of "active defense" and "wearing down the enemy." September 3-11, the 1st Guards, 24th and 66th Armies of the Stalingrad Front under the general command of the representative of the Headquarters, General of the Army G.K. Zhukov attacked the left flank of the 6th army of F. Paulus, trying to break through the corridor to connect with the army of Chuikov. But the offensive did not achieve its intended goal. At the same time, the losses of troops were very heavy. 7th Tank Corps of General P.A. Rotmistrov at the time of entering the battle consisted of 191 tanks, by the end of the operation only 15 vehicles remained in his ranks. All the same shortcomings in the organization of the offensive had an effect. On

310

only three days were allotted for the preparation of the strike of the three armies, Zhukov's attempts to delay the start of the offensive were severely suppressed by Stalin, who was under the impression of General A.I. Eremenko about the possible fall of Stalingrad. The troops launched an offensive without having time to carry out reconnaissance and reconnaissance of the area, to ensure interaction with aviation and artillery, and to coordinate the actions of various formations. The enemy, on the other hand, using reconnaissance data, uncovered ahead of time the preparation of the Soviet troops for a strike and prepared to repulse it. Already at the moment the offensive began, non-German artillery opened fire, inflicting heavy losses on the troops that had reached the lines of attack, then non-German aviation entered into action. On the second day it became clear that there was no way to break through the enemy's defenses with such preparation. It is not surprising that three German infantry divisions managed to repel the offensive of 19 Soviet rifle divisions and 5 tank brigades, inflicting heavy losses on them. But Stalin insisted, and the offensive continued for another week. The result of these actions was negligible, the losses were enormous. However, this did not prevent Paulus from resuming the assault on Stalingrad and on September 22 to cut through the defenses of the 62nd Army.

Operation Uranus. Finally, it became obvious to the Soviet command that further attempts to attack "head on" against the prepared German defenses would not save Stalingrad. At the end of September, during another discussion at Headquarters of the situation on the Volga, G.K. Zhukov and A.M. Vasilevsky came to the conclusion that it was necessary to look for "some other solution."

From the memoirs of Marshal G.K. Zhukov:

"All attention was focused on the possibility of carrying out an operation on a large scale, so as not to spend the reserves being prepared and already ready for private operations. In October, we completed the formation of strategic reserves. By this time, our industry had significantly increased the production of aircraft of the latest design and ammunition for artillery.

After going through all the possible options, we decided to offer

311

I.V. Stalin gave the following plan of action: first, to continue to wear down the enemy with active defense; the second - at. to begin preparations for a counteroffensive in order to inflict such a blow on the enemy in the Stalingrad region that would sharply change the strategic situation in the south of the country in our favor.

As for the specific plan of the counteroffensive, then ... it was clear to us that the main blows should be delivered on the flanks of the Stalingrad group, covered by the Romanian troops! .

Stalin, after listening to the plan of Zhukov and Vasilevsky, proposed again to strike along the Volga against the connection with the 62nd Army, as Zhukov had just unsuccessfully tried to do, but this time he was convinced of the prospects of the new plan. By that time, Stalin, apparently, himself began to incline towards the search for a different solution. The plan for a large-scale offensive operation near Stalingrad received the code name "Uranus". The essence of the plan boiled down to the idea of a deep encirclement and subsequent destruction of the entire Stalingrad enemy grouping by the forces of three Soviet fronts. The complete defeat of the army of F. Paulus was planned before help from other sectors of the front arrived, i.e. this time the command of the Red Army hoped to get ahead of the enemy in a maneuver.

The implementation of the bold and ambitious plan was greatly facilitated by the configuration of the front line. The forces of the Soviet fronts hung not only over the flanks, but also over the rear of the 6th German Army, which had advanced deeply towards the Volga. The "Uranus" plan was to break through the enemy's defenses with mobile formations northwest and south of Stalingrad and close the encirclement in the Kalach area. November 13 plan

Operation Uranus was approved by Stalin. A feature of this plan was the absence of an overwhelming superiority of the Red Army on the offensive front.

| Zhukov G.K. Memories and reflections. In 3 volumes. Volume 2. 10th ed. - M.: Publishing house APN, 1990. S. 302-303.

312

CORRELATION OF THE FORCES OF THE WEHRMACHT AND THE RED  
ARMY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE COUNTEROFFENSIVE NEAR STALINGRAD.

Tanks, pcs. | 1560 675 2.3:1 Quentin |  
8 1.6 10290 4

The achievement of superiority was achieved by massing the NII FORCES in the directions of the main strikes. Thus, in the breakthrough sectors of the Southwestern and Stalingrad fronts, which accounted for only 9% of the total length of the front line, 50-70% of infantry, about 80% of tanks and up to 85% of artillery were concentrated. This provided the Soviet troops with a significant superiority in the directions of the main attacks - 2-2.5 times in manpower and 3-5 times in equipment?. In the armies operating in the breakthrough sectors, shock mobile groups were created consisting of two tank and cavalry corps, long-range artillery groups, anti-aircraft artillery groups and groups of guards mortar units ("Katyushas"). All this testified to the unusually thorough preparation of the Soviet troops for the upcoming offensive.

The concept of the Soviet plan was a classic strike under the base of the wedge with an exit into the enemy's rear. The command of the Red Army had already repeatedly tried to realize this idea in the summer of 1941 during counterattacks in border battles, during the counteroffensive near Moscow in the winter of 1942, but each time the German command repelled these blows without difficulty. In the autumn of 1942, the position of the German troops near Stalingrad was extremely similar to the situation near Moscow a year ago. In the same way, the wedge of the German offensive was extended towards the cherished goal, the achievement

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Military-historical essays. - Book 2. M., 1998. S. 49.

2 Ibid. pp. 50-51.

313

which decided the outcome of the entire campaign, just like the German

the troops were exhausted by long battles, and the enemy managed to concentrate numerous reserves. In the same way, the order of the high command to continue the offensive at all costs was adamant. What has changed? Why did the offensive of the Red Army this time lead to such a massive defeat of the Wehrmacht?

The decisive role was played by the fatal mistakes of the German high command. Of course, it was impossible to hide the large-scale preparations for a new Soviet offensive in the conditions of the Don steppes. And already in the first half of November, air and radio reconnaissance of the enemy revealed a significant strengthening of the Soviet troops northwest and south of Stalingrad. It became obvious that the command of the Red Army was preparing a major offensive on this sector of the front. Having received this information, the commander of the 6th Army, General F. Paulus, proposed to withdraw troops from the Stalingrad region beyond the Don, reducing the greatly extended front and thus obtaining strong reserves. This proposal was supported by General M. Weichs, Commander of Army Group B. Paulus had already begun preparations for the withdrawal of part of the army, but these actions were severely suppressed by Hitler's order "under all circumstances to hold Stalingrad and the front on the Volga"! Hitler's own opinion was dictated by the certainty that the Red Army was no longer capable of carrying out offensive operations on a large scale, and this factor turned out to be decisive, contrary to the real state of affairs at the front. In Hitler's decision, ideology prevailed over the pragmatics of military art. In the fall of 1942, he expressed his view on this problem very clearly: "The German soldier remains wherever he sets foot."

Noteworthy is the clear analogy between Hitler's position on the issue of holding positions in Stalingrad and Stalin's attitude to the defense of Kiev in September 1941. In both cases, the operational-tactical situation strictly dictated the need to leave

: The Stalingrad epic: Materials of the NKVD of the USSR and military censorship from the Central Administration of the FSB of the Russian Federation. - M.: "Belfry-MG", 2000. S. 278. Citation. In: The Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 51.

314

held positions, and in both cases the ideological aspect prevailed. For both Stalin and Hitler, the retention of the city was necessary to solve political and ideological problems. And each of them underestimated both the military and propaganda consequences of a possible defeat, which turned out to be much larger and more significant than the visible benefits. Interesting and something else. From that moment on, the opponents - the army at the front, and the top leadership in the capitals - seemed to change places, repeating both the mistakes and the most successful decisions of each other with a difference in time.

As a result, the command of the German troops of Army Group "B" had to rely only on its own forces, with the main goal of holding the occupied territory. The last thing I did



to do by General M. Weichs is to withdraw three tank and one motorized divisions to the front-line reserve, however, greatly weakened by prolonged battles. This was the last hope to repel the approaching offensive of the Red Army.

In the early morning of November 19, 1942, the troops of the Southwestern Front, Lieutenant General N.F. Vatutin and the Don Front, Lieutenant General K.K. Rokossovsky struck at the positions of the enemy. Everything seemed to go against the plan from the start. The weather got in the way. The strongest fog, and then the snowfall, chained the aircraft to the ground. All the hope of the attackers was again on the artillery, but poor visibility did not allow it, despite the 80-minute fire preparation, to reliably suppress the targets. The breakthrough of the defense was delayed, and then the tank corps, originally intended for operations in the depths of the enemy's defenses, were thrown into the offensive. It was a risk - if the tankers had suffered heavy losses during the breakthrough, then the very possibility of encircling Paulus's army would have been called into question. But by that time, Soviet generals were already capable of making such risky decisions. And the risk justified itself - a massive blow of Soviet tanks of the 5th Panzer Major General P.L. Romanenko and the 21st Ar-

-Miy Lieutenant General I.M. Chistyakova literally overturned the defense of the 3rd Romanian army, panic began in its units. The long-awaited hour of the tank corps of the Red Ar has struck

315

missions - breaking the enemy's communications, destroying his reserves and rear, they confidently closed the encirclement ring around the entire German 6th Army, the command of which was just beginning to guess the true scale of the impending catastrophe. As a result, by the end of the first day of the offensive, the tank corps of the Southwestern Front, having broken through the enemy defenses, entered the operational space.

Not everything went smoothly. On the very first day of the offensive, it turned out that the Headquarters had made obvious mistakes in defining the tasks of the Don Front; its forces were not enough to break through the enemy's defenses either on the first or on the second day of the offensive. But all this was more than paid off by the successes of the first Southwestern, and then the Stalingrad Front (commanded by Colonel General A.I. Eremenko), which went over to the offensive a day later. The blow of the 51st Army, Major General N.I. Trufanov and the 57th Army, Major General F.I. Tolbukhin on the defense of the 4th Romanian army turned out to be a complete surprise for the enemy. The mobile army groups introduced on the first day of the offensive surrounded and captured the 13th Romanian Infantry Division. The cavalry of the Stalingrad Front also operated successfully. 4th Cavalry Corps Lieutenant General T.T. Shapkin was introduced into the breakthrough on the night of November 21. The cavalymen, having passed through the rear of the enemy for more than 60 km, quite unexpectedly for the enemy, went to the village of Abganerovo, where they completely defeated the Romanian garrison. .

And what about the enemy? At first, the Soviet offensive

caused the German command special concern. Moreover, Hitler, having received the news of its beginning, only remarked melancholy: "We have been expecting this for a long time!" Reserves were thrown against the shock groups of the Southwestern and Stalingrad fronts. And this time the enemy acted according to the classical scheme - the blows were directed at the flanks of the Soviet offensive. Before, as it was, for example, near Kharkov in May

. 1942, this tactic invariably ended with the encirclement and encirclement of the shock groups of the Red Army. However, this time the proven method did not work. commanders

1 Cited. Quoted from: Great Patriotic War... S. 54.

316

advancing formations, expecting an enemy counterattack, were already ready to repel it. Thrown into the flank of the 13th Panzer Corps of the 57th Army, the German 29th Motorized Division only managed to slow down its advance. The 48th Tank Corps was thrown against the 5th Panzer Army of the Southwestern Front, which entered the gap. But in a hurry and the enemy began to make mistakes. The commander of Army Group B, General M. Weichs, at first incorrectly determined the direction of the main attack, and the corps began to move to the northeast, and then, already on the move, he had to turn to the northwest. As a result, the divisions of the corps stretched out on the march and were unable to carry out a coordinated strike. With the beginning of the counter-offensive near Stalingrad, the opponents clearly changed places.

From the memoirs of Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky:

"All attempts by the enemy to interfere with the encirclement turned out to be belated. Hitlerite formations, tank and motorized, being transferred from the Stalingrad region to the place of the breakthrough, were introduced into battle in parts and, falling under the blows of our superior forces, were defeated. With them, the same picture was obtained as with the units of the Red Army in the battles in the big bend of the Don. Failing to make a cardinal decision to withdraw in time, the fascist German command, as in its time and ours, tried to impose small "patches" on the ever-widening huge gap in the Stalingrad direction.

The true dimensions of the impending catastrophe were only recognized at Hitler's Headquarters by the end of the third day of the Soviet offensive. The news coming from near Stalingrad painted an alarming picture. The front on the flanks of the army of F. Pau-

Lusa was torn apart, the Romanian allies retreated in panic, pursued by Soviet tanks, which had already appeared at the command post of the 6th Army, the counterattack of the 48th Panzer Corps failed. In this situation, only an urgent retreat to the rear positions could save the 6th Army. Otherwise `her environment became just a matter of time.

1 Rokossovsky K.K. Soldier duty. - M.: Military Publishing House, 1997. S. 238.

317

The opinions of the German command were divided, but this time Hitler's opinion turned out to be decisive: "Be that as it may, Stalingrad must be held under any circumstances." Now Paulus' army was doomed.

From the memoirs of a Wehrmacht officer G. Biedermann:

"Stalingrad! Blinded by a political doctrine that abused notions of honor and the protection of the interests of the country, and stubbornly insisting that the territory must be held at all costs, the Great General of All Times, that is, our Fuhrer in Berlin, put the army to a painful death | in the East.

As the war progressed, the willingness of German soldiers to sacrifice themselves became the accepted norm. As bad leadership began to emerge more and more, the desire of the soldiers to die for political ideas began to wane, which in turn led to a general decrease in the chances for soldiers to survive this catastrophe on the Eastern Front. However, the code of honor, which has long been inherent in a German soldier who stood up with a weapon in his hands to defend the fatherland, remained in his mind. The soldiers continued to sacrifice their lives not for the sake of party members, but for the sake of the fatherland.

The formations of the Red Army continued their rapid advance along the German rear. Success was inspiring, and the commanders, having the opportunity to freely take the initiative, performed miracles of command and control. For the successful encirclement of the enemy, it was necessary to capture the only surviving bridge across the Don near the city of Kalach. General A.G. Rodin, commander of the 26th Panzer Corps of the Southwestern Front, realizing that the enemy had already prepared the bridge for destruction, ordered to capture it with a daring night attack, using the confusion that had arisen in the rear of the enemy. On the night of November 22, a consolidated detachment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel G.N. fi

1 Cited. In: The Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 60.

2 Biderman G. In mortal combat. Memoirs of an anti-tank crew commander. 1941-1945 / Transl. English A.S. Tsypchenkova. - M.: ZAO Tsentrpoligraf, 2005. S. 1671-168.

318

Lippova - five tanks and 300 fighters in vehicles - following

in a column at high speed and with headlights on, made a 20-km march along the German rear and went to the bridge. Okhra mistook the convoy for its training unit, armed with Soviet equipment, and let it through to the opposite bank without hindrance. The bridge was captured without loss and was held for ten hours until the main parts of the corps approached.

Parts of the 13th Panzer Corps of the Stalingrad Front captured the village with a swift attack. Varvarovka, where the filling station of the 29th German motorized division was located. The blow of the Soviet tankers was so sudden that they managed to capture 52 perfectly serviceable German tanks together with their crews, which amounted to more than half of all the tanks of the VISIA.

By the end of November 22, formations of the 5th Panzer and 21st Armies of the Southwestern Front had completed the encirclement of almost 40,000 Romanian troops in the area of the village of Raspopinskaya. And already on the night of November 23, it was cut into two parts by oncoming strikes from Soviet rifle divisions. The swiftness of the blows completely demoralized the enemy, and just a day later - on November 24, the Romanians capitulated. This was the first surrender of a large enemy group to the Soviet troops during the war. Total in the Ras-

Popinsky was taken prisoner over 27 thousand soldiers and officers, including 3 generals and a large number of weapons.

On the morning of November 23, on the fifth day of the counteroffensive, the troops of the Southwestern and Stalingrad fronts completed the encirclement of the enemy's Stalingrad grouping. The forces of the two fronts moving towards each other united at the village. Soviet. Two encirclement rings were created - inner and outer, the distance between them was 40-110 km. in the neighborhood

1 But the history of the capture of the bridge at Kalach very clearly revealed the remaining shortcomings in the actions of the Soviet command, in particular, the chronic underestimation of the importance of communications. Filippov's group was left without communication at the decisive moment, since the only (!) radio station went out of service (!) while still on the march. As a result of the approach of the main forces of the corps, his command did not learn about the heroic capture of the bridge. (See: The Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945, book 2, p. 61.)

319.

The headquarters of the German 6th Army, 5 German corps consisting of 20 divisions, 2 Romanian divisions, reserve units, rear units and institutions - in total about 160 separate units with a total strength of about 284 thousand. soldiers and officers of the Wehrmacht and Allied Forces. During the operation, the enemy lost 145,000 soldiers and officers (including 65,000 prisoners), 3,600 machine guns, 2,900 guns, 700 mortars, more than 300 tanks, over 250 aircraft. For the first time, the losses of the Red Army troops turned out to be less than the losses of the enemy - 79.4 thousand people, 359 tanks and 125 aircraft?.

On the morning of November 24, the troops of three fronts, without any operational pause, began to liquidate the encircled enemy grouping. But attempts to dissect the encircled group "on the move" failed. There were several reasons for this. The most important of them was the gross mistake of the Soviet command in determining the number of encircled. For a long time it was believed that no more than 80-90 thousand people were in the ring near Stalingrad, i.e. three times the real number. Correspondingly, estimates of the number of equipment and weapons of the enemy turned out to be underestimated. Based on erroneous estimates, an incorrect calculation of the forces needed by the fronts to destroy the Paulus army was also made. As a result, there were simply not enough forces to break through the German defense. The Soviet armies were weakened by losses during the breakthrough of the enemy's defense and offensive and needed to be replenished and rested. In addition, as a result of the compression of the encirclement, the enemy shortened his front, thus obtaining additional reserves with which he could maneuver, quickly transferring them along short internal communications. We must pay tribute to the German troops and commanders. They really quickly recovered from the initial shock and created

1 Only parts of the 48th tank corps of General F. Game (22nd tank division and part of the 1st Romanian tank division) were able to escape from the encirclement. But instead of a reward, Hitler considered the corps commander to be the main culprit in the defeat. General Geim was put on trial and sentenced to death, which was commuted to imprisonment. (See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. P. 66.)

2 See; The Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. P.71.

320

very tough defense, making the most of the Soviet defensive fortifications built on the outskirts of Stalingrad, the features of the terrain, and even the wrecked Soviet tanks left on the battlefield, turning them into a kind of armored pillboxes.

Fierce fighting continued until November 30, and their results were more than modest. It became obvious that a new complex and lengthy operation was needed to destroy the encircled grouping.

In the meantime, a plan for a new operation was approved at the Soviet Headquarters of the High Command, which received another space name - "Saturn". In terms of the scale of the idea, the new operation surpassed the "Uranus". It was supposed to defeat the main enemy forces on the Middle Don with enveloping blows and then go to Rostov. The success of this operation opened up dizzying prospects for blocking the entire Army Group A in the North Caucasus, which meant the collapse of the entire southern flank of the German front and changed the strategic situation on the Soviet-German front. Operation Saturn was to begin on December 16th.

But in the same days of early December, the German command also approved an offensive plan. Operation "Winter Thunderstorm" was supposed to ensure the deblockade of the army of Paulus by striking from the Kotelnikovsky area of the army group "Goth", the basis of which was the 57th tank corps (two tank divisions). At the time of the approach of the Goth group to Stalin Grad, the formations of the 6th Army were supposed to strike towards it. The overall management of the operation was entrusted to one of the best commanders of the Wehrmacht, Field Marshal E. von Man. matte. The preparation of the "Winter Thunderstorm" required time, but it was sorely lacking. With each passing day, the front got better and better from the army of Paulus, and the distance that the Goth group had to cover increased inexorably. And Manstein, contrary to his vast experience, took the risk of launching an unprepared operation - he decided to throw his divisions on the offensive until their full concentration was completed. The whole stake was placed on the surprise of the blow, and Manstein was not mistaken.

PA. Kilichenkov 321 k.

The Soviet command, carried away by the prospects that were opening up, really did not attach any importance to intelligence reports about the concentration of enemy tank formations near Kotelnikov, believing that the enemy was not yet ready to strike. Therefore, the powerful tank strike inflicted by the enemy on the positions of the 51st Army of the Stalingrad Front on the morning of December 12 turned out to be absolutely unexpected. The Soviet defense was broken through, and on the very first day, Manstein's tanks deepened 25 km, then the depth of advance reached 45 km. It seemed that a little more and the enemy would approach the inner ring of encirclement. But the events that followed showed that the Soviet command had already learned some lessons from its own hard experience. The reserves of the Stalingrad Front, the 4th Mechanized and 13th Tank Corps, thrown towards Manstein, managed to stop the enemy advance on the river. Aksai. But Manstein also brought his reserves into battle. Now everything depended on who was faster and more decisive in maneuver. Previously, this competition was invariably won by the opponent.

To meet the tank divisions of the Goth group that were breaking through, the Soviet Headquarters advanced the 2nd Guards Army, Lieutenant General R.Ya. Malinovsky. The army was supposed to make a 170-200-km forced march and take up the positions of the bunk. Myshkov - the last serious obstacle on the way to Stalingrad. The march was made on foot in incredibly difficult conditions - frost and blizzard at night and thaw during the day. In a day, foot columns could travel no more than 35-40 km, but they still made it. When the enemy reached the line of the river. Myshkova,

He was met by advanced units of the 2nd Guards Army. On December 16-23, unprecedented fierce battles flared up in this area. The intensity of the battle and the stamina of the troops were such that, paraphrasing Napoleon's famous statement about the battle of Borodino, one can say: "the Germans showed themselves worthy of victory, and the Russians acquired the right to be invincible -

mi ... "At the critical moment of the battle, Manstein threw into battle

1 These events served as the basis for Yu.V. Bondarev "Hot Snow" (1969) and the feature film of the same name.

322

his last reserve, the 17th Panzer Division, and turned to Hitler with a proposal to send the 6th Army to break through. Only about 35 km remained before Stalingrad, the surrounded soldiers of Paulus already distinguished the sounds of the cannon, but Hitler did not allow the 6th Army to move. |

Manstein's last hope for a breakthrough was buried by the beginning of the Southwestern Front on the Middle Don. Further attempts to free those encircled near Stalingrad had to be abandoned. At that moment, the fate of the 6th Army was finally decided, its troops continued to

resistance is still almost a month and a half, and February 2, 1943 was

the soldiers of the army capitulated. 113 thousand soldiers and officers were captured, incl. and 22 generals, including the commander of the army, Field Marshal F. Paulus!. The total losses of the Wehrmacht during the counteroffensive of the Red Army near Stalingrad exceeded 800 thousand people, 2000 tanks, 10 thousand guns and mortars, about 3 thousand combat and transport aircraft. The losses of the Red Army amounted to 485.8 thousand soldiers and officers, of which 155 thousand were irretrievable?

Manstein's offensive forced the Soviet command to change the original plan of Operation Saturn - the 2nd Guards Army of General R.Ya. Malinovsky was thrown towards Manstein.

From the memoirs of Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky:

"... it seemed to me that it would still be more expedient to use the 2nd Guards Army in the way that the Stavka intended to do at first, that is, quickly deal with the encircled grouping. The bold option opened up enormous prospects for future actions on the southern wing of the Soviet-German front. The game, as they say, was worth the candle, and the risk to the floor was not so great ... Of course, I can be reproached for

1

Hitler awarded this title to Paulus a few days before the CII chapter, thus hinting at the need for suicide, since no German field marshal had previously been captured.

\* See Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 99.

323

that now, when everything has become clear, one can argue and prove anything, but even then I was a supporter of using the 2nd Guards Army primarily to defeat the encircled enemy. He also suggested turning the entire 21st Army against them if enemy forces approached those surrounded from outside. The Stavka preferred to accept the option proposed by its representative, Vasilevsky. We thought it was more reliable. But even this option did not exclude elements of risk. The beautiful operation planned by the Headquarters in the Rostov direction could not have succeeded. However, that is how it turned out. The operation was narrowed down, since all attention and significant forces were diverted to the so-called Manstein group. This helped the Germans to avoid an even bigger catastrophe in the Rostov direction than near Stalingrad. I am sure that if Vasilevsky had not been with us at Zavorykino at that time, but at his place in Moscow, at the General Staff, then the question of using the 2nd Guards Army would have been decided as suggested by the Stavka, that is, the army left would be to strengthen the strike of the Southwestern and Voronezh fronts in the Rostov direction or to accelerate the liquidation of the enemy surrounded at Stalingrad ... "!

Indeed, the turn of the 2nd Guards Army of General Malinovsky towards Manstein led to the abandonment of a prospect of dizzying proportions. In the event that Rostov was captured by Soviet troops in December 1942, the 1st Tank and 17th Field Armies remained cut off in the North Caucasus. Their very likely destruction or defeat (although there was also a hypothetical possibility of evacuation to the Crimea through the Kerch Strait) could lead to the complete destruction of the entire defense system on the southern flank. The Wehrmacht would simply not be able to make up for such losses. The only possibility was a quick withdrawal of the troops that remained combat-ready to the line of defense along the Dnieper. In essence, it could have been about the liberation of territories captured by the enemy in the spring and summer of 1942. But still, the Headquarters, or rather, I.V. Stalin decided to choose "a tit in the hands." Answer

1 Rokossovsky K.K. Decree. op. pp. 240-241.

324

to the question "why" Stalin himself gave in a conversation with General V.I. Chuikov after the war: "It was very risky. It was impossible to risk. The people were looking forward to victory! In this case, Stalin's reluctance to take risks was understandable - the opportunity to win such a major victory after a year and a half of the most difficult defeats was too expensive to risk it.

But there was another aspect of this problem. The Soviet command obviously did not have enough forces in the decisive direction. Per-



The prospect of the entire operation to block German troops in the North Caucasus depended on the presence in the reserve of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of at least two additional general shackle armies. But they didn't show up. As a result, at the most critical moment of Manstein's offensive, the command had to decide where to send Malinovsky's only army in reserve. Perhaps the most annoying thing in this situation was that the solid reserves of troops, incl. and shock tank formations, were blocked in other sectors of the Soviet-German front. Headquarters, in planning Operation Uranus, made a colossal and unforgivable miscalculation. Only 18% of the manpower and 20% of the tanks of the total number at the disposal of the Red Army command turned out to be on the most important sector of the planned general offensive. At the same time, a completely unpromising sector of the offensive in the Moscow direction chained 31% of the personnel and almost 46% of tank formations to itself.

Among the explanations for such a distribution of forces on the eve of the historic and turning point battle near Stalingrad, in addition to Stalin's traditional fears about Moscow, one should especially note the underestimation of the possible prospects for an offensive near Stalingrad. In a sense, this success turned out to be "unexpected", and the Soviet command was simply not ready to develop it.

A. 2

'  
Cit. Quoted from: Pereslegin S. Comments / Manstein E. Lost victories / Per. with him. Comp.  
S. Pereslegin, R. Ismailov. - M.: LLC "Publishing House AST"; St. Petersburg: Tegga Rapiasiza, 2002. S.  
429.

325

NUMBER OF FORCES AND EQUIPMENT IN THE ACTIVE ARMY  
BY SECTIONS OF THE STRATEGIC FRONT  
ON NOVEMBER 19, 1942!.

NO

A

7th separate army | 1550/25 340/5.6 Leningrad-  
1 1 Volkhovskiy,  
Severo- | 1160/19 |  
232/204 | 16435/21.3 | 089/14, Western 1050/17 1 24 682/32.0 3 | 890/31.4? 375/45.9

.  
'  
Bryansk,  
550/9 644/10, | 7834/10.1 | 884/12.0

Yugo-  
Zapadny, Don- 1  
1 , Sta- | 850/14 | 1zlv4 | 155020 | 46zulo,9 lingradsky 1000/16 |  
816/13.5 |  
8797/11.4 | 319/4.4

6160/100

277/9.1

1170/38.6

928/30.6

6030/100 | 77 180/100 3032/100

7350/100

\*

Without taking into account the Air Defense Forces of the country and the Navy, as well as anti-aircraft guns and 50-mm mortars. |

A direct consequence of this miscalculation was the abandonment of the original plan of Operation Saturn, its plan was revised, and its new version was called Little Saturn. The scale of the operation changed, and instead of reaching Rostov, its main goal was to reach the rear of the Don Army Group, the advanced units of which were sent to deblockade the 6th

! Comp. Quoted from: History of the Second World War, 1939-1945. Vol. 6. Moscow: Military Publishing House, 1976. S. 35.

326

army. As in the counter-offensive near Stalingrad, the forces involved in the operation "Small Saturn" did not have a decisive superiority over the enemy. But the commander of the Southwestern Front, General N.F. Vatutin went to create strike groups at the expense of the second-best sectors of the front. In fact, this was the same technique with which the German generals so effectively broke through the defenses of the Red Army in the campaigns of 1941-1942. This time, these weapons were used against them. The offensive began on December 16, the first two days of fighting were extremely difficult. The turning point came after the Soviet tanks moved to the rear of the 35th Italian Corps. Once again, the Allies failed the German army. The Italians turned into a stampede. On December 19, the entire defense front

us the enemy on the middle Don collapsed. The tank corps of the South-Western Front, having entered the operational space, began to pursue the randomly retreating enemy. And again, his own tactics were used against the Wehrmacht. Soviet tank formations, without getting involved in protracted battles, bypassed the defense nodes, destroyed the enemy's communications and control system, disorganizing the entire rear. All this led to a general demoralization of the troops, the emergence of panic and a disorderly retreat. The culmination of these actions was the attack of parts of the 24th tank corps of General V.M. Badanov, the village of Tatsinskaya, where the rear base of the entire Don Army Group was located. In the early morning, after a powerful volley of Katyushas, the tanks of the corps attacked the village and the nearby airfields from three sides. According to the memories of the surviving German soldiers, it was a real hell. Thousands of people rushed around the airfield, enveloped in heat, dozens of aircraft burned and exploded. Soviet tanks rammed the surviving planes, shot rushing soldiers and officers at Upor. At the same time, another group of tanks attacked the railway station, where a trainload of 50 aircraft was captured. In total, as a result of the defeat of Tatsinskaya, the enemy lost more than 3,500 soldiers.

And officers, 15 tanks, 50 guns and over 300 aircraft.

To

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 89.

327

On December 31, 1942, Operation Little Saturn ended, Soviet troops advanced 150-200 km, completely defeating the 8th Italian Army, the Hol Lidt Task Force and the remnants of the 3rd Romanian Army. The losses of the Wehrmacht and its allies amounted to about 120 thousand soldiers and officers, 350 tanks, 700 aircraft, 2,200 guns and mortars. The Red Army troops lost 95,700 men, 940 tanks, 120 aircraft, 600 guns and mortars:'.

The heavy losses suffered by the Italian and Romanian troops in the Don steppes were very painfully received in their homeland. Relations between Germany and her allies became seriously complicated, laying the foundations for the future crisis of the fascist bloc.

Operation Mars. While on the southern flank of the Soviet-German front the scale of the grandiose catastrophe hanging over the Wehrmacht was looming, on the western direction the Red Army troops once again tried to repeat the success of the Stalingrad encirclement. The new operation received the code designation "Mars", in the history of the Great Patriotic War it is better known as the second Rzhev-Sychevskaya. In its course, all the shortcomings of the first Rzhev-Sychevsk operation manifested themselves in full and even more vivid form. .

The general task of the operation remained the same - the encirclement and destruction of enemy forces on the Rzhev-Vyazma ledge. As in the first time, the armies of two fronts were to operate - the Western (commander - Colonel General I.S. Konev) and Kalinin (commander - Colonel General M.A. Purkaev), but this time their number increased twice - four armies from each front, about 1,300 tanks and almost 4,000 guns. The formations of the Western Front were to operate in the former operational direction. Rzhev - Sychevka. The armies of the Kalinin Front were tasked with breaking through the enemy defenses and developing the offensive.

1 See: Great Patriotic ... S. 94.

328

general direction to Smolensk. However, during the preparation of the operation, reconnaissance of the Kalinin Front detected the movement of enemy reserves in the Vitebsk region, and in order to cover the offensive of the main forces, a preemptive strike was planned by the right-flank armies in the direction of Velikie Luki.

Thus, the Soviet troops had to operate practically on the same directions as three months ago, solving practically the same tasks. This time the preparation of the operation was completely different, there was no need to talk about any secrecy. The dates for the start of the operation were postponed several times, and the enemy discovered preparations for an offensive long before it began. All this had the most negative impact on the actions of the Soviet armies. It was necessary to advance on a defense prepared in advance and in depth: a layered defense, the stability of which was greatly facilitated by the nature of the terrain. The enemy's defense lines ran along the banks of the Vazuza and Gzhat rivers and were maximally adapted to the features of rugged terrain, replete with hollows, hills and skyscrapers. Numerous trenches were covered with minefields, barriers and abundantly saturated with bunkers and dugouts. A developed fire system, targeted terrain - all this was supplemented by pre-prepared positions of anti-tank artillery and self-propelled guns. In a word, an experienced and selfless enemy was waiting for the Red Army units in well-prepared positions. .

On November 25, the offensive of the Western Front began, and the first thing that again had to be faced was bad weather. Just like near Stalingrad, these days the weather forecasters were wrong. The real storm has begun. It continued throughout the entire artillery preparation and nullified its results. The enemy fire system remained unsuppressed. The infantry and the tanks accompanying it had to literally break through the enemy's fortifications under aimed fire. From the very first day, the troops began to suffer huge losses, The battlefield was littered with dozens of

329

burnt tanks. After ten days of fighting, six out of eight

the tank brigades that supported the 20th Army lost almost all materiel and were withdrawn from the battle. offensive

nie troops of the Western Front ran out of steam. The troops were able to

move only 10 km. On December 18, the offensive was stopped

puppy. :

The offensive of the troops of the Kalinin Front began much more successfully. The 41st Army (commanded by Major General G.F. Tarasov) broke through the enemy defenses and brought mechanized and rifle corps into the gap, rushing towards the city of Bely. But Field Marshal G. Kluge, commander of Army Group Center, quickly parried this success. The tank divisions deployed to the place of the breakthrough hit the flank of the 41st Army and surrounded the units that had broken through. For more than a week the corps fought in the encirclement.

From the memoirs of a participant in the events A.I. Gribkov:

"Every day, under the active influence of a superior enemy and his air strikes, the front of defense narrowed and eventually began to include mainly a forest area about 2x3 km in size, which was shot through. When repelling German attacks, the entire personnel was included in the battle, up to the headquarters commanders and the corps commander; we were all armed with machine guns and grenades.

The situation was especially complicated by the lack of food. In the early days, there were still a few products: canned food, crackers. Then it was all over. And then they began to dig out the dead horses from under the snow ...

They took shelter from the wind and cold in some kind of dugouts and huts, slept (if it can be called a dream) on the ground covered with branches of firs and pines. However, it was not even a dream, but some kind of half-forgetfulness of deadly tired people, exhausted by cold and hunger. Fatigue accumulated from day to day, but

1 See; Mikhail Khodarenok, Oleg Vladimirov. Not to fight, but to slaughter. An attempt to defeat the German troops on the Rzhev-Vyazemsky ledge in November-December 1942 turned out to be a heavy defeat for the Red Army // NVO, No. 20 (242), 2001.

330

she did not cross the line beyond which comes indifference to fate. We didn't become "savages" as we were called

Germans"!).

This time, too, it was not possible to establish air supply to the encircled units. On the night of December 16, the remnants of the encircled group led by General M.D. Solomatins received an order to break through to the main forces. The formations suffered heavy losses, lost almost all heavy equipment, lost their combat effectiveness, no more than half left the encirclement? The offensive of the Kalinin Front in this direction was stopped, it did not bring success in other directions either. |

In general, Operation Mars, or the second Rzhev-Sychevskaya, cost both fronts very dearly, irretrievable losses, according to official figures, amounted to 215,674 people (39.5% of the total). In terms of the number of average daily losses - 8,295 people killed and wounded, this "forgotten" operation turned out to be one of the bloodiest of the entire war among front-line operations, second only to the defeat of the Crimean Front in May 1942 (14,714 people killed and wounded) and battle near Kharkov in May of the same year (15,399 people killed and wounded)<sup>3</sup>.

"Small Stalingrad". But the fighting on the Kalinin Front did not end there. The center of the front's efforts shifted to the right flank, fierce battles flared up again. Start-

The Velikolukskaya offensive operation was going on. It did not receive any "space" name, but it turned out to be no less bloody. Initially, the 3rd shock army, Major General K.N. Galitsky was tasked with capturing the city

| Gribkov A.I. Confessions of a lieutenant. - M.: Thought, 1999. S. 108-110.

<sup>2</sup> German sources indicate that out of 40,000 surrounded, about 15,000 were killed and 5,000 taken prisoner. Soviet figures estimate total casualties at 8,500. (See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2.S. 214.)

<sup>3</sup> See: Russia and the USSR in the Wars of the 20th Century: A Statistical Study. - M.: OLMA-PRESS, 2001, S. 311-312.

331

and the most important railway center of Velikiye Luki and defeat the opposing enemy grouping. The army received solid reinforcements - rifle and mechanized corps, RGK artillery, several divisions of Katyusha rocket launchers, and a number of other units. As a result, under the command of General Galitsky was a powerful strike force of over 95 thousand people, more than 2,000 guns and mortars, almost 400 tanks, which ensured multiple superiority over the enemy in personnel,

artillery and tanks in the area of the breakthrough. |

Everything promised success. But the enemy wasted no time. Non-German troops proved once again that they are capable of not only effectively breaking through the defense, but also creating it themselves. The commanders of the Red Army were more than once struck by the thoroughness with which the enemy prepared his positions, even if they were only briefly occupied. And the Germans had occupied the city of Velikiye Luki for a long time, and there was enough time to turn it into a powerful center of resistance, adapted to waging a long all-round defense with all German thoroughness. Considering the terrain favorable for conducting defense - rivers, swamps, hills, it is easy to imagine what awaited the Soviet troops, who were preparing to storm Velikiye Luki.

Initially, General K.N. Galitsky planned to deeply cover the city and encircle it. But then the plan had to change. A representative of the Stavka, General of the Army G.K., arrived in the army. Zhukov and front commander General M.A. Purka ev. Zhukov set another goal for the army.

From the memoirs of General K.N. Galitsky:

, "The military operations of the army are organically connected with the operations troops of the front and our Armed Forces as a whole. One plan, even if deeply thought out, is not able to suddenly, fundamentally change the situation. Therefore, the main thing in the operation of the army is its role and significance on an operational and strategic scale... All these strikes, interacting with each other, ensure the counteroffensive of the Soviet troops near Stalingrad, which has begun today, and tie down the enemy's reserves. This is the main role of the 3rd shock army in the upcoming hostilities.

332

viii in the Velikoluksky direction... To attract the forces of the enemy is the main task of the 3rd shock army... we will consider the task completed if you attract the forces of the enemy and he cannot remove them from your sector for transfer to the south... "!

Of course, throwing troops head-on on a well-prepared defense in order to tie down the enemy's forces is not the best course of action. An envelopment and encirclement operation would be much more effective, since encirclement, or its threat, pins far more enemy forces to the scene. It is not known what were the views of the representative of the Stavka G.K. Zhukov - in his memoirs, the marshal bypasses this episode. One can only assume that the recent experience of numerous and unsuccessful encirclement attempts, undertaken under the leadership of Zhukov himself in the western direction, led him to prefer the simpler tactics of frontal attacks.

The operation to pin down enemy forces began on November 24. Formations of the 3rd shock army quickly reached Velikiye Luki, but further advance was stopped by fierce

strong enemy resistance. The units of the 3rd Army operated much more successfully, operating around Velikie Luki, which made it possible to encircle the city on November 29. The enemy command, having assessed the threat of encirclement in time, began to act according to a well-trying and repeatedly applied scheme. From the depths, an urgent transfer of mobile reserves began to the place of the breakthrough of Soviet divisions. Now the Soviet formations were threatened with the prospect of being in the "bag". This has already happened more than once in different sectors of the Soviet-German front. Everything now depended on the efficiency of Soviet front-line intelligence and the quick actions of the command. In fact, this was the main problem of the Soviet control system - a very slow reaction to a rapidly changing environment and the inability to quickly make optimal decisions. But this time, the Soviet command was finally able to extract

. lessons from recent brutal defeats.

Galitsky K.N. Years of severe trials, 1941-1944. Notes of the commander. - M., 1973. S. 179.

333

Army commander General K.N. Galitsky and the representative of the Headquarters, General G.K. Zhukov managed to organize the repulsion of enemy counterattacks and continue the operation to storm Velikiye Luki. The fighting took on an extremely complex and protracted character. The front line lost its clear outline, the effect of a "layer cake" appeared - the positions of the opponents interspersed each other. The position of the encircled group, which received the loud name "Fortress", was controlled from Berlin, Hitler gave the order to hold out to the last, promising to release the encircled. All this was extremely reminiscent of the situation in Stalingrad, differing only in the scale of events. The surrounded garrison of Velikiye Luki numbered about 7,000 people. The battles for the city acquired an extremely tense and fierce character. Even after the dissection, the resistance of the isolated groups continued for several days. The remnants of the garrison - less than 500 people stopped resistance only on January 16. The fighting for the city lasted almost two months. The losses of the Soviet troops during the fighting amounted to 104,022 people killed and wounded, the enemy, according to Soviet estimates, lost about 19,500, of which 4,500 were captured.

Subsequently, in Soviet official historiography, it was customary to explain the actions of the Soviet fronts in the western direction against the German Army Group Center by the desire to pin down enemy forces and prevent their transfer to Stalingrad, where the outcome of the entire autumn campaign was decided. From this point of view, all the described operations were generally considered successful, but still, the form of their conduct and the level of organization, not to mention the number of losses, raised doubts even among the participants in these battles.

From the memoirs of General M.E. Katukov:



"We entered the concentration area in the late autumn. We walked at night through Kalinin forests and swamps. Off-road, dirt. We moved along the paths - floorings made of poles, logs and brushwood. Railroads stretched for many tens of kilometers. I don't even think about getting off them: a step or two to the side - and I get stuck

<sup>1</sup> See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 312.

334

eat swampy swamp. Needless to say, the speed of our movement in those nights did not exceed walking speed. During the day they hid in the forests. Otherwise, narrow, threaded, gati could become a large cemetery for our troops. Fascist aviation still dominated the air. "Crutches"! from sunrise to sunset they loomed in the sky, the "Messers" roared over the gates, controlling the approaches to the front. ...

During November-December, all three mechanized corps periodically fought on their axes - offensive and defensive. We acted separately both in terms of tasks and time. Frankly, there were then conversations among the tankers: why not strike the enemy at the same time with the forces of three corps? In this case, we would certainly have achieved greater success, we would have created a tangible turning point in the combat operations of the Kalinin Front. ... Our actions ... prevented the fascists from transferring part of the formations to support the grouping, which fell into a hopeless situation on the right bank of the Volga, but also forced them to reinforce the troops operating on our front.

All this is clear, although even now one can argue: could it not have been possible to solve the same problem by other methods without exhausting rather large tank forces in ineffective battles? True, impenetrable forests and swamps prevented this. But still, I think, the tank grouping in the Kalinin direction was not used to the full extent of its capabilities.

1942 became one of the most difficult years in the history of the Great Patriotic War. The enemy again managed to seize the strategic initiative and make a breakthrough to the Volga and the Caucasus, to seize vast territories in the south of the USSR. During the spring-summer campaign, the troops of the Red Army suffered a number of severe defeats, quite comparable in scale to the catastrophe of 1941. The total losses of the Soviet armed forces in the campaigns of 1942 amounted, according to official data, to

<sup>1</sup> German reconnaissance aircraft E \ -189, which received this nickname in the Red Army because of the characteristic two-keel hull shape.

To . Katukov M.E. On the edge of the main blow. - M .: Military Publishing House, 1974. S. 181 - 2.

335

nym, 7.369 million people, which exceeded the losses of 1941 by 2.895 million soldiers and officers. At the same time, irretrievable losses amounted to 3,258,216 people, exceeding the losses of 1941 by 120,543 people. About 1.515 million soldiers and officers were captured and went missing, in 1941 this figure was 2.335 million soldiers and officers! The total irretrievable losses of the German armed forces on the war fronts (according to German data) amounted to 537.9 thousand soldiers and officers in 1942, which exceeded the losses of 1941 by 219.8 thousand?. But by the end of 1942, the situation on the Soviet-German front began to change dramatically. In the course of operations "Uranus" and "Little Saturn", the crisis of Soviet operational art was finally overcome - instead of frontal strikes of "active defense" that bled the troops, a classic operation was successfully carried out to encircle large enemy forces with the subsequent development of the success. The enemy defense was broken through with an almost equal balance of forces of the parties and in the shortest possible time - five days. For the first time in the entire period of the war, a powerful enemy grouping was surrounded and its front collapsed over 300 km. Attempts of such strikes were made earlier - during the winter and spring offensives of 1942, but they all ended in constant failure. Surrounding the priests themselves were surrounded. The success at Stalingrad testified to the profound changes taking place among the Soviet generals, who were mastering the skills of conducting highly maneuverable operations with decisive goals.

"Dizzy with Success"

The situation at the beginning of 1943 for the Soviet side was in many ways reminiscent of the situation of the previous year, when, after the successful start of the counteroffensive near Moscow, under the influence of general euphoria, clearly inflated expectations arose up to "the complete defeat of the enemy in the coming year." act

1 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ...

S. 250. 2 Calculated according to: `Müller-Gillebrand B. Land Army of Germany

1933-1945 - M.: Izographus, Eksmo Publishing House, 2002. S. 716.

336

Consequently, the large-scale and impressive success at Stalingrad gave rise to new grandiose plans. At the beginning of January 1943, a new plan for the development of a further offensive was developed at the Soviet Headquarters of the High Command. Again, as a year ago, it was supposed to launch large-scale offensives on the entire front - from Leningrad to the Caucasus. Again it began to seem that one more powerful blow would be enough and

the front of the enemy will finally collapse, his disorderly flight will begin.

The most promising in terms of offensive remained the southern flank of the Soviet-German front. The encirclement of the 6th Army in Stalingrad destroyed the entire German front on this flank, which made it possible to carry out large-scale operations with the most decisive goals. Practically at the same time, the preparation and conduct of the Voronezh-Kharkov and North Caucasian front-line operations began.

Attack on the Don. The goal of the large-scale offensive in the upper reaches of the Don was the liberation of the Kharkov industrial region. For this, the forces of three fronts were involved - Voronezh Lieutenant General F.I. Golikov, Bryansky under the command of Lieutenant General M.A. Reiter and Southwestern Colonel-General N.F. Vatutin. In total - 36 divisions, 2 tank corps, 11 rifle and 14 tank brigades. They were opposed by 30 divisions of Army Group B (commanded by Field Marshal M. Weichs). With an almost equal ratio in manpower, the Soviet troops outnumbered the enemy in the number of tanks by 2.9 times, guns by 1.8, yielding in aviation by 1.4 times. But at the disposal of the Soviet Headquarters there were powerful reserves - two more general shakles and one tank army, two tank and two cavalry corps, 9 divisions and 5 brigades. Such a superiority in forces made it possible to confidently plan large-scale operations and count on success. In addition, an important factor was

the fact that half of the enemy forces were Hungarian and Italian divisions, the combat effectiveness of which was significantly inferior to the divisions of the Wehrmacht. That is why the Soviet command

337

and planned to inflict the main blow on the southern flank of the German grouping, where the divisions of Germany's allies were concentrated.

The concept of the new operation was reminiscent of the Stalingrad version. It was planned, by hitting the positions of the Italian and Hungarian divisions, to quickly break through the defenses and surround the entire grouping. In preparing the operation, the Soviet command was already beginning to take into account the lessons of the Stalingrad offensive. In order to prevent the possibility of creating a solid defense in the pocket, a simultaneous cutting blow was planned from the very beginning. The front command took a justified risk. concentration of forces due to the weakening of secondary areas. So, in the secondary sectors of the front, the lines of defense, designed for a division, were now occupied only by a battalion. As a result, in places of breakthrough, superiority in manpower reached 2.7-3 times, in tanks - 1.3-2 times, in artillery - 5-8 times. In order to break through the defense quickly, the rifle divisions were reinforced with a large number of tanks. Masking measures were also strictly observed, as a result of which the

It was necessary to achieve complete surprise and mislead the enemy about the composition of forces and the direction of the strike. General M. Weikhs concentrated his few reserves in the direction of not the main, but the auxiliary strike of the Voronezh Front.

The offensive began on 12 January. And immediately made themselves felt all the measures taken. On the very first day of the formation of the 40th Army, Lieutenant General K.S. Moskalenko broke through the main line of defense of the 3rd Hungarian Corps on a front 10 km wide. The Hungarians, like their "colleagues" the Romanians near Stalingrad, after the first blows lost control and began a disorderly retreat. Much more serious resistance was met by the formations of the 3rd Panzer Army of Lieutenant General P.S. Rybalko, who launched an offensive on the southern flank of the front on January 14, but here, too, the decisive superiority of the Soviet troops made it possible to break through the defenses of the German troops, after which tank corps went into the raid behind enemy lines. Thanks to their decisive, and often daring blows, by January 18, resisting

338

The main enemy grouping, which included 13 divisions, was surrounded in the area of Ostrogozhsk and Rossosh and cut into two parts. This, in turn, created the prerequisites for the rapid liquidation of the encircled grouping in parts. On January 27, the operation was successfully completed. 15 enemy divisions were defeated, his losses amounted to 123 thousand people, of which 97 thousand were captured, 160 tanks were captured; 3,160 guns and mortars. Now the Soviet soldiers did not have time to escort the prisoners, their columns stretched to the east in thousands, often without any protection. All this was reminiscent of 1941 in detail, only now the columns of prisoners were moving east.

Success near Rossosh created the prerequisites for a strike under the base of the formed ledge of the German front in the Voronezh region, in which 12 divisions of the German 2nd Army held the defense - 125 thousand people, 65 tanks, 2,100 guns, 300 aircraft. The plan of the operation provided for a strike against the converging axes of the armies of the Voronezh Front from the south and the Bryansk Front from the north. The fronts had 27 rifle divisions, 2 tank corps and 15 brigades, air support was provided by 2 air armies, a total of 250 thousand people, 700 tanks, 4,000 guns, 527 aircraft! Significant superiority in forces foreshadowed success. In addition, the troops of the Red Army were inspired by the victories they had just won, while in the enemy units, and above all allied units, on the contrary, there was a decline in morale. The specter of the encirclement of St. Leningrad weighed heavily on the consciousness of soldiers and commanders.

On January 24-25, the armies of the two Soviet fronts went over to the offensive. The superiority in forces made it possible to quickly break through the enemy's defenses, and the absence of significant front-line reserves from the German command made it possible for the shock army groups to quickly reach the most important communications centers. As before, the decisive role was played by tank forces.

unity of both fronts. On January 28, the tanks of the 118th brigade

`Colonel L.K. Bregvadze quite unexpectedly burst into

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 161.

- 339.

to the railway station of the city of Kastornoe at the moment when the enemy military echelons were already leaving the city. But the tanks did not let them leave. With point-blank fire, they shot the locomotives, and then began to destroy the trains themselves. An unimaginable panic arose at the station and in the city: After the tanks of the 45th brigade of the 40th army approached from the opposite side of the city, the encirclement ring closed. It turned out to be 7 German and 2 Hungarian divisions, in total about 40 thousand soldiers and officers. On January 29, the liquidation of the encircled group began.

But here the Soviet command began to make mistakes. There was a clear "dizziness from success." Headquarters, apparently in a state of ecstasy from the pictures of the defeat of the enemy armies on the Don, ordered to continue the offensive without slowing down. Front Commander General F.I. Golikov did not dare to object to Stalin and entrusted the task of liquidating the pocket in the Kastornoe region to the 38th army, and by that time only 27,500 people remained in its composition. The army was unable to create a continuous encirclement front, as a result of which six German divisions managed to break out of the encirclement and join the main forces. The boiler in the Kastornoe district was liquidated by February 1. In total, during the Voronezh operation, 11 enemy divisions were defeated, his losses exceeded 83 thousand soldiers and officers.

The deep advance of Soviet troops in the Voronezh direction created a serious threat to the German front in the Kharkov region. In fact, the entire front on the upper Don collapsed. On a line of about 400 km, 17 armies of three Soviet fronts were opposed by only two (!) divisions of the 2nd German army, its remaining nine divisions remained encircled near Stary Oskol. The high command of the Wehrmacht began an emergency transfer of reserves, removing them from wherever possible. Preparations for the Soviet offensive on Kharkov, the plan of which was called "Zvezda!", began on January 26, when the battles near Voronezh and Kastorny had not yet been completed. The blow was supposed to strike forces

1 See: Shtemenko S.M. General Staff during the war. - M.: Military Publishing House, 1968. S. 97.

340

all the same three fronts - Bryansk, Voronezh and South-West.

On February 2, the operation began. The resistance of the few covering troops of the German 2nd Army was broken on the very first day, and the Soviet tanks again rushed into the gap. But this time, enemy reserves came to the rescue on their way. On February 5, units of the 3rd Panzer Army of General P.S. Rybalko went to the river. Seversky Donets, but were stopped by the SS Panzer Division "Adolf Hitler" moved here. Formations of the 69th Army of General M.I. Kazakov were counterattacked by another SS Panzer Division - "Reich". These were elite, fully equipped formations, their morale was very high. But in a situation of a general successful offensive on a wide front, the effect of a "turbulent current" arose, when the flow of water simply bypassed powerful obstacles, undermining them from the side and from behind. While the SS divisions held back the advance on Kharkov of the 3rd Panzer and 69th Armies, formations of the 40th Army of General K.S. On February 7, Moskalenko reached the outskirts of Belgorod, creating the possibility of bypassing Kharkov from the north, and the 60th Army of Lieutenant General I.D. Chernyakhovsky was liberated on February 8 by Kursk. |

Hitler attached particular importance to the retention of Kharkov, believing that its loss would be detrimental to the prestige of Germany. To protect it, a special group of troops was created, numbering 55 thousand soldiers and officers, 104 tanks and 720 guns and mortars. By February 14, the city was deeply engulfed by Soviet troops of the 40th, 69th and 3rd tank armies, and its retention lost all meaning. However, Hitler, as in the case of Stalin Grad, ordered to defend the city to the end. A new Wehrmacht catastrophe was prevented by one of the division commanders, who began to retreat against the order. February 16 Kharkov was liberated. Now the road to the Dnieper opened up before the troops of the Voronezh Front. It was something to make my head spin!

In this situation, the Headquarters, and under its influence and command

General F.I. Golikov finally fell into Hei Foria. They demanded that the troops continue the offensive. Pursuing the retreating enemy, free the troops of the front

341

on February 23, the city of Sumy and approached Poltava. But these were the last successes of the front in the winter offensive. The troops were at the limit of their capabilities, the number of divisions instead of the prescribed 11 thousand fell to 3-4 thousand, there was an acute shortage of all types of supplies and, first of all, ammunition and fuel. But the main thing is that the formations of the front carried out the offensive for almost 50 days without any rest. It was absolutely impossible to demand more from them.

In early March, the Kharkov strategic offensive operation ended. The depth of advance of the troops of the three fronts reached 360-520 km, the width of the offensive front was 250-400 km. During the operation, 26 enemy divisions were defeated, his losses amounted to more than 160 thousand soldiers and officers. But the losses of the Soviet troops were not much less -

153,561 people are total losses and 55,475 are irretrievable. 1,023 tanks, 2,106 guns and mortars, 307 aircraft were lost.

Leap to Donbass. "Dizziness from success" also had a FULL effect during the offensive of the Soviet troops on the Don Bass. After the encirclement of the army of Paulus near Stalingrad, the troops of the Southwestern and Southern Fronts reached the lower reaches of the river. Seversky Donets, deeply enveloping the Don Army Group from the north and south, which created a real danger of a breakthrough by Soviet troops into the Donbass. For Germany, the retention of the Donbass was of great importance, only in 1943 Hitler expected to get there before | million tons of metal and over 4 million tons of coal.

Commander of the Southwestern Front, General N.F. Vatutin, whose troops achieved, perhaps, the most impressive results, "was captured by the idea ... to throw a strong mobile group in the direction of Mariupol, cutting off all the enemy's escape routes from the Donbass." Vatutin presented his plan to the Headquarters, where it was approved under the code name "Jump" ?. If successful, the enemy troops in the Donbass and Rostov region were threatened with encirclement and complete annihilation. But the enemy also understood this. Chief of Staff of the Tank Corps, General F. Mel

1 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 284, 485. -2 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 172.

342

Lentin assessed it this way: "Despite the successful withdrawal of the German armies from the Caucasus, the threat of a new Stalingrad hung over Manstein. The arrows of Russian strikes ominously stretched towards the crossing of the Dnieper near Zaporozhye.

The Southwestern Front launched an offensive on 29 January. At first, the calculations of the Soviet command were fully justified - on the very first day the enemy's defenses were broken through and the shock group of the front was introduced into the breakthrough. The pace of advance of the tank corps this time turned out to be very high, which made it possible already on February 6 to liberate the cities of Izyum and Balakleya, on February 1, the 3rd Guards Army of Lieutenant General D.D. Le Lyushenko approached Voroshilovgrad (now Lugansk). The battle for the city lasted nine days. The city was defended by three enemy tank divisions, supported by a powerful system of fortifications. But the commanders of the Soviet formations - Generals M.I. Zaporozhenko, V.M. Badanov, A.F. Popov managed to organize the interaction of tank and rifle formations to break the enemy defenses. The daring actions of the 8th Cavalry Corps of General M.D. contributed to the successful assault on the city. Borisov, who managed to bypass the city and capture the Debal'tsevo railway station, destroying a dozen echelons and numerous warehouses with stocks of the 1st tank army of the enemy. On February 20, the city was liberated.

In the first half of February, the troops of the Southern Front successfully operated (commander - General R.Ya. Malinovsky)

On the Rostov and Novocherkassk directions. On February 12, the divisions of the 5th shock army of General V.D. Tsvetaev, by means of a deep envelopment, liberated the town of Shakhty.

Realizing the impossibility of stopping the Soviet offensive against the Don Army Group, its commander, Field Marshal E. Manstein, persuaded Hitler to order the withdrawal of the army group forces to the rear line of defense along the river. Mius. This was the only way to obtain reserves by reducing the length of the front line. German troops started

waste. Literally on the heels of them followed advanced

——\_—

'  
Mellenthin F. Tank battles. Combat use of tanks in World War II. - St. Petersburg: Polygon, 1998. S. 256.

343

parts of the Southern Front, not giving the enemy the opportunity to gain a foothold on the lines of defense. Formations of the 2nd Guards Army Lieutenant General Ya.G. Kreizer, having crossed the frozen Don on the move, went out kr. Aksai liberated Novocherkassk after fierce fighting. A day later, troops of the 28th (commanded by Lieutenant General V.F. Gerasimenko) and 44th (commanded by Major General V.A. Khomenko) armies liberated Rostov-on-Don. Front Commander General R.Ya. Malinovsky, realizing the importance of preventing an organized withdrawal of Manstein's troops to the line of the river. Mius, threw the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps of General T.I. Tanaschishin. The guards did what seemed impossible. On the night of February 17, with a swift and unexpected throw, they broke through the so-called "Mius Front", but they could not hold the captured positions until the approach of the main formations. Manstein's reserves were able to restore the "Mius Front" and hold it until the summer of 1943.

The last success of the winter offensive was the breakthrough of the formations of the Southwestern Front to Krasnograd. There was very little left before the cherished crossings across the Dnieper. But this success was achieved at the end of the offensive. By that time, the troops of all three Soviet fronts—Voronezh, Southern, and Southwestern had completely exhausted their offensive capabilities. Having fought from 150 to 300 km, they broke away from the supply bases, experiencing an acute shortage of ammunition, weapons and, most importantly, in urgent need of replenishment. An urgent, most urgent need arose to attend to the consolidation of troops on the achieved lines.

But the Headquarters of the High Command set the fronts a completely different task - to reach the Dnieper line as soon as possible before the beginning of the spring thaw. And Stalin, and the General Staff, and the commanders of the fronts themselves once again showed all the signs of that same "dizziness from success." The high command of the Red Army once again took wishful thinking,



overestimating their own successes and catastrophically underestimating the enemy.

344

From the memoirs of the head of the Operational Directorate of the General Staff, General S.M. Shtemenko:

"This plan, which arose on the basis of an incorrect assessment of the actions of the enemy, had only the appearance of conformity with the real situation. However, at that time both the front, and the General Staff, and the Headquarters were convinced of the truth of their assessments and calculations. Of course, this is unforgivable, but it is a fact. The victorious reports from the fronts lulled the vigilance of both the Headquarters and the General Staff, although for the sake of truth it should be said that we had doubts, we shared them with Vatutin, and then reported them to the Supreme Commander in the presence of Marshal G.K. Zhukov". |

This ecstasy of their own victories was fueled by enthusiastic telegrams from the Western allies.

From the telegram of W. Churchill I.V. Stalin, February 14, 1943:

"The chain of extraordinary victories, the link in which is the liberation of Rostov-on-Don, the news of which was received tonight, makes it impossible for me to find words to express to you the admiration and gratitude that we feel in relation to Russian weapons. My most sincere desire is to do as much as possible to help you.

While the number of divisions of the Southwestern Front was reduced to 4-6 thousand people, and the main striking force of the front was the mobile tank group of General M.M. Popov numbered only 88 tanks, in a situation where the gaps in the front between the advancing armies reached tens of kilometers, General N.F. Vatutin still demanded not to slow down the pace of the offensive. The commander was sure that the enemy was only thinking about a speedy retreat beyond the Dnieper.

But the enemy was thinking about something completely different. The idea of "revenge for Stalingrad" did not leave the minds of the German command during the entire Soviet winter offensive. Its main initiator

b „Shtemenko S.M. Decree. op. S. 101.

th Churchill W. World War II. In 3 books / Abbreviated translation from English. - M.: Military Publishing House, 1991. Book. 2.T. 3-4. S. 622.

345

became Field Marshal E. von Manstein, according to many - the best "operational mind" of the Wehrmacht. Manstein's idea was ambitious and decisive. It was planned, through successive deep envelopments and encirclements, to defeat the shock groups, first of the Southwestern, then the Voronezh and Central Fronts, which was supposed to return the Wehrmacht to the lost strategic initiative on the entire Eastern Front. Manstein managed to assemble a powerful fist of 7 tank and 4 infantry divisions, having achieved superiority over the forces of the Southwestern Front in tanks and aircraft by 2.4 times in the breakthrough sector.

Soviet intelligence failed until the very last moment to detect the preparation of a German counterattack. And when on February 19 the 2nd SS Panzer Corps launched a blow from the Krasnograd region against the divisions of the 6th Army, this turned out to be a complete surprise for the front command. The SS Panzer divisions quickly crushed the resistance of the weakened formations of the Southwestern Front, cutting off two divisions of the 6th Army in the Barvenkovo area from the main forces on the first day of the offensive. Two days later, three more divisions were surrounded by the forces of the 48th German Panzer Corps in the Sinelnikovo area. General N.F. Vatutin attempted to parry the enemy's attack by moving his meager reserve, the 244th Rifle Division, to meet his tank divisions. The division was thrown into battle in the "best traditions" of 1941 - right from the march, without air cover, without artillery, without reconnaissance, which sealed its fate. Manstein's tanks, without stopping, destroyed the division along with its headquarters.

The entire seriousness of the situation and the degree of threat was realized by the front commander only by February 25, when he ordered the transition of his formations to the defense. But it was already too late. The troops did not have time to create a continuous front of defense, the enemy proceeded to cut and encircle the main forces of the 1st Guards and 6th armies. The German offensive was delayed only at the turn of the river. Seversky Donets. The Soviet troops were forced to retreat 100-120 km, the encircled divisions continued to fight, and then, in small groups, made a breakthrough. From

346

no more than 10-20% of the original composition of the surrounded compounds remained, and all equipment and supplies were lost. The southwestern front suffered a heavy defeat in the same places as a year ago.

But if the defeat of the front of General Vatutin could be explained by intelligence failures and underestimation of the enemy, then the defeat of the Voronezh Front that followed soon after had its only reason for the inexplicable arrogance of its commander, Colonel General F.I. Golikova. Manstein had been smashing the troops of the Southwestern Front for the second week already, and General Golikov still considered his main goal to reach the Dnieper. Setting new tasks for his vanguard - the 69th Army, Lieutenant General M.I. Kazakov, the commander paid attention not to the threat of a blow to the flank, but to the fact that "before

There are 400-500 km left of the Dnieper, and 30-35 days until the spring thaw ... take decisive measures to increase the pace of the offensive! It was only on March 1 that the order to go over to the defense went to the troops, but it was too late. The next day, the 2nd SS Panzer Corps attacked the exhausted formations of the 3rd Panzer Army of the Voronezh Front. The main forces of the army - two tank corps and three rifle divisions - were surrounded and defeated in three days, only seven tanks escaped from the encirclement. After that, Manstein's main strike force - tank divisions, having broken the defenses of the Voronezh Front, rushed to Kharkov and Belgorod. General Golikov, repeating the mistakes of 1941, threw scattered formations towards them, which were successively destroyed by the enemy.

Only the powerful reserves of the Headquarters of the High Command could stop Manstein's offensive, and they were at her disposal. But only on March 10, in a telephone conversation with Stalin, General A.M. Vasilevsky raised this question?. Arriving at the Voronezh Front after the capture of Kharkov by the enemy, another representative of the Headquarters, General G.K. Zhukov proposed to the Supreme Commander-in-Chief

vol. Cited. In: The Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 184.

Book 2 See: Vasilevsky A.M. The work of a lifetime. In 2 books. — M.: Politizdat, 1990. .2.S.8.

347

use all available reserves to cover the Belgorod direction. But they were too late. On March 18, the enemy captured Belgorod. The further advance of the enemy to Oboyan created a real threat to the entire Soviet grouping on the Kursk salient. Once again, the situation was saved by the reserves of the Headquarters. On her orders, a total of seven armies were advanced to the southwestern direction, of which two were armored. In the end, they managed to stop Manstein's further advance and prevent the revani! for Stalingrad.

As a result of a powerful German counteroffensive in the Kharkov direction, the troops of the Voronezh and Southwestern fronts suffered heavy losses. In total, they amounted to 86,469 people, incl. irretrievable - 45,219, the troops suffered great damage in equipment and weapons - 322 tanks, 3,185 guns and mortars, 110 combat aircraft '. The troops of the Red Army were driven back 100-150 km, but still the enemy did not achieve his goal. The front of the Soviet defense in the southwestern direction withstood, the Wehrmacht failed to return the lost territories.

Liberation of the North Caucasus. No less than at Stalingrad and Voronezh, the Stavka expected success in the North Caucasus. Here it was planned to cut off and defeat the North Caucasian (Army Group "Don") and Caucasian (Army Group "A")

enemy groupings - a total of 43 divisions, incl. 8 tank and 3 motorized. For this, very powerful forces were involved - five fronts (59 divisions, 53 brigades, 2 tank and 3 mechanized corps), the Black Sea Fleet and the Azov Flotilla. According to historians, this plan was quite feasible?. But the Headquarters and the General Staff made gross and inexplicable miscalculations in the planning of operations. For their preparation, it was necessary to carry out gigantic measures to regroup the troops of the fronts and prepare the offensive itself. In particular, the Transcaucasian Front was to transfer five divisions and eight brigades, together with reinforcement units, in the most difficult winter conditions, with an acute shortage of roads and transport

1 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century...S. 284, 485.? See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 113.

348

funds. To do this, the troops had to proceed by railroad, then by sea, and finally by march. In order to solve this problem, the front had, in fact, to create a new transport network of iron, unpaved and even cable cars, bridges, passages in the mountains, etc. But the deadlines for completing this titanic work were completely unrealistic - only 8-10 days.

Another miscalculation was the complete prevention of the possibility of the enemy withdrawing from their positions, although after the events on the Don this possibility became more and more likely. There were no options for this case. In the midst of the preparatory work of the Soviet fronts for the offensive, Army Group "A" began to withdraw from the North Caucasus. Fearing the possibility of a "second Stalingrad" in the Caucasus, Hitler, after long hesitation, nevertheless agreed to the withdrawal of troops. The beginning of their retreat was discovered by Soviet intelligence with a great delay. Now we had to change the plan on the move and, most importantly, we had to get ahead of the enemy in speed of movement and, again, in maneuver. But what happened on the Don, where the tank corps of the Red Army operated in their "native element" - in the steppe expanses, turned out to be completely beyond the power of the troops of the Transcaucasian Front, advancing through the mountainous regions of the North Caucasus. Under these conditions, cavalry formations reinforced with tanks could operate much more effectively. For this purpose, a horse-mechanized group was created under the command of General N.Ya. Kirichenko.

However, soon after the start of the offensive, it turned out that neither the commander of the Transcaucasian Front, General of the Army I.V. Tyulenev, nor the commander of the Northern Front Group, Lieutenant General I.I. Maslennikov failed to ensure effective command and control of the shock groups of the front.

From the memoirs of General S.M. Shtemenko:

"One night F.E. Bokov called me to him and ordered

to report on considerations regarding the creation of a cavalry army in the North Caucasus.

"Stalin is interested," he added. The proposal to transform the 4th Guards Cavalry Corps into a cavalry army came from the commander of the Transcaucasian Front, I.V. Seulene

349

va. Organizationally, it was supposed to unite seven cavalry divisions in it: the 9th and 10th Kuban Guards, the 11th and 12th Don Guards, the 30th, 63rd and 110th.

Stalin reacted to this with increased attention.

- In fact, why not create a cavalry? he asked Bokov and immediately ordered to analyze the issue at the General Staff...

The idea was very enticing. In the North Caucasus, it would seem, there was everything for its implementation: both horses, and excellent cavalymen from the Kuban and Don Cossacks, and spaces that ensured free maneuver of large masses of cavalry. In addition, we were all brought up in deep respect for the heroic past of the red cavalry. However, the conditions of the Patriotic War differed significantly from the conditions of the Civil War, and this should have been thought about ...

There were ... supporters of the existence of cavalry "in its purest form." These views came into conflict with already existing experience, which, as you know, is always a criterion of truth. When used: unreinforced cavalry, she suffered too many losses, achieving very limited results with her truly heroic raids. In some cases, they simply had to be rescued, up to the delivery of oats on airplanes to the rear of the enemy, from where the cavalry formations could not get out on their own.

All this was weighed when considering the creation of a cavalry army. And in the end, the General Staff gave a negative opinion on this score, believing that this cumbersome organization would be extremely vulnerable from the ground and from the air and would not justify the hopes placed on it. The Supreme Commander-in-Chief agreed with our considerations!"!

The enemy broke away all the time, managed to retreat in advance

'  
Shtemenko S.M. Decree. op. pp. 64-66. It is very significant that even after the end of the war, General of the Army I.V. Tyulenev believed that in those conditions this proposal was completely justified. The fact that the cavalry was never formed, he was inclined to explain "the intrigues of the enemy of the people of Beria." (See: Army General Tyulenev: Moscow in the life and fate of the commander: Collection of documents and materials / Compiled by: N.I. Tyuleneva, V.K. Sablin, A.V. Timofeev. - M.: Publishing house of the Main Archive of Moscow, 2005 pp. 96.).

350

prepared positions and met the advancing hard counterattacks. Instead of organizing management I.I. Maslennikov, in accordance with the "best traditions" of the beginning of the war, saw his task in being everywhere in person. At the same time, the general "rigidly demanded the fulfillment of orders, threatened with severe punishments, sent various orders to the troops, but this only suppressed the initiative of his subordinates." The Headquarters tried to achieve a change in leadership style: "The third day is passing, as you do not give data on the fate of your tank and cavalry groups. You broke away from your troops and lost contact with them. It is possible that with such a lack of order and communication in the Northern Group, your mobile units will be surrounded by the Germans. Such a situation is intolerable..." The retreating formations of the 1st German Panzer Army managed to take up a defensive line along the river. Kuma, to which the Soviet troops reached only two days later. The headquarters with great displeasure pointed out this to the front commander I.V. Tyulenev: "Your plans for the Northern Group are biased towards the enemy, do not pursue the goal of encircling and destroying his southern grouping, but are built in a defensive manner and are aimed at pushing the enemy out of the foothills of the Caucasus, and not at capturing or exterminating him..." But Stavka's intervention did not help this time either.

. Stalin did not want to put up with the fact that the Wehrmacht managed to avoid defeat, and demanded that the Transcaucasian Front, together with the Southern Front, conduct an operation to encircle the 24th division of the enemy, a kind of "second Stalingrad". But it was already

`absolutely unrealistic. By the end of January, the enemy left the North Caucasus, splitting into two groups. Part of the forces of the 1st Tank Army went through Rostov to the Donbass, the remaining formations withdrew to the Taman Peninsula, where they united with the 17th Army into a powerful grouping of more than 20 divisions.

In the Black Sea direction, the Transcaucasian Front was given the task: "to send the main forces to capture Novo Rossiysk and the Taman Peninsula in order to close the

`move to the enemy on the Taman Peninsula". To solve this

EVE

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. pp. 118, 125.

351

tasks, it was planned to carry out two operations at once - "Mountains" in the Krasnodar direction and "Sea" in Novorossiysk. The name of these operations was given by Stalin himself!, thereby reflecting the essence of their plan - striking in two directions with the aim of cutting off the 17

ditch. The forces of the front were thus divided into two operational directions. Not surprisingly, there were not enough of them for both operations. This miscalculation led to serious consequences. The 17th German Army was able to make a successful withdrawal to the Taman Peninsula, where the so-called "Blue Line" of defensive structures was subsequently created. The attempts of the Southern Front by Lieutenant General A.I. Eremenko to break through to Rostov. At first, the mobile groups of the front managed to break into the depths of the enemy's defenses. The flat character of the terrain facilitated the actions of tank and mechanized formations, the enemy front had not yet been restored after the disaster at Stalingrad. Under these conditions, everything depended on how skillful the control of the actions of the strike groups would be and whether the enemy was able to organize countermeasures. But at the decisive moment, the forces of the front were not enough. Weakened in previous battles, tank and mechanized corps could not break through further. In addition, at the height of the offensive, the 2nd Guards Army lost its fuel supply. The enemy managed to take advantage of the pause. The commander of the army group, Field Marshal E. Manstein, skillfully maneuvering his reserves, at the end of January stopped the Soviet offensive on the lines of the Manych and Seversky Donets rivers, reliably covering Rostov. The seemingly imminent catastrophe of the German front was averted. The overall result of the North Caucasian strategic operation was the advance of the Red Army formations by 300-600 km, the liberation of the Stavropol Territory, most of the Rostov Region and the Krasnodar Territory. But at the same time, the troops of the Transcaucasian and Southern fronts owed their success not so much to the skill of command, but to the forced and rapid withdrawal, almost flight, of the formations of the German

1 See: Shtemenko S.M. Decree. op. P.73.

352

Army Group "A" because of the threat of a breakthrough of Soviet troops to Rostov. "Second Stalingrad" did not work. Instead of breaking through and encircling the troops of General I.V. Tyuleneva only pushed the enemy with frontal, frontal blows. Such tactics inevitably led to heavy losses and a rapid loss of combat

, troop abilities. All this, both in general and in details, is very similar. passed the actions of the Red Army near Moscow a year ago. The total losses of the troops of the Southern, Transcaucasian, North Caucasian fronts and the Black Sea Fleet from January 1 to February 4 amounted to 154,539 people, including 69,627 irretrievable losses. The troops lost 220 tanks, 895 guns and mortars, and 236 combat aircraft.

The result of the incompleteness of operations "Mountains" and "Sea" was the delay in the liberation of Taman until the autumn of 1943. The German troops were able to create a powerful defense system in the shortest possible time and hold the Taman Peninsula for another eight months. In addition to the strategic North Caucasian operation, the Red Army had to organize and conduct five more (!) front-line operations. But even after that, destroy the 17th

the army failed. In September-October 1943, the enemy successfully evacuated almost 400,000 troops to the Crimea. At the same time, the cable car between Yenikale and Cape Chushka operated unhindered throughout the entire period, with a daily capacity of about 1 thousand tons. And although the Black Sea Fleet and the Azov Flotilla were given the task of disrupting the evacuation, the enemy carried it out practically without hindrance. During the period of evacuation from Anapa to Kerch, 190 German convoys passed, of which only 30 were attacked by Soviet aircraft<sup>1</sup>. It is noteworthy that this time neither the front command nor the Headquarters even considered the issue of conducting an amphibious assault with the aim of striking at the rear of the German grouping on the Taman Peninsula, although the configuration of the front itself and the remaining absolute superiority

<sup>1</sup> See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 383, 485.

<sup>2</sup> See: Three centuries of the Russian fleet. In Zt. T. 3./B.I. Rodionov, V.D. Do tsenko, G.G. Kostev et al./Ed. I. V. Kasatonova. - St. Petersburg: Publishing house 410605, 1996. S. 136-137.

12 A. Kilichenkov 353

the movement of the Black Sea Fleet in the ship composition directly led to the idea of this. The fleet only carried out the landing of tactical assault forces to capture Novorossiysk.

Once again, the command of the Red Army demonstrated its inability to "fight with the fleet." Another confirmation of this was the tragedy of the "river assault" on the coast of the Sea of Azov near Temryuk in early July 1943. The concept of the operation was risky and original. It was supposed to covertly, moving through the floodplains in boats, to land two rifle divisions northwest of Temryuk and seize a bridgehead behind enemy lines, which was supposed to create conditions for a successful breakthrough of the enemy defenses. The plan seemed quite realistic, since the German troops practically did not defend the coast in this area. The operation began quite successfully, but enemy aerial reconnaissance very quickly discovered a huge concentration of boats moving towards Temryuk. From that moment on, the landing, the success of which depended entirely on surprise, lost all meaning. But the flotilla of boats provided by him continued its movement. German assault aircraft were thrown against it, and the landing force marched for almost 50 km, constantly being subjected to air strikes. True, these attacks did little, as the boats quickly dispersed and camouflaged themselves in the thickets of reeds. And then the Germans concentrated batteries of rapid-firing anti-aircraft artillery on the shore, the fire of which literally scattered the flotilla. 427 boats were sunk and about 200 damaged, the landing force was practically destroyed, about 630 people were taken prisoner. The cause of the tragedy was gross planning errors. The landing party did not have air or sea cover, was not provided with disinformation measures, and in fact turned out to be left to its own devices. The Germans destroyed it practically



skiing in field conditions.

Breaking the blockade of Leningrad. The new operation to break the blockade of Leningrad was the fifth in a row, and its preparation began immediately after the failure of the previous attempt. ending

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 139.

354

The new version of the operation plan was approved by the Headquarters on December 2. It provided for a strike in the same Shlisselburg direction as in the autumn of 1942. It would seem that the failure of the Sinyavin operation should have forced the Soviet command to choose another option. , But again, the decisive factor turned out to be that in this direction the troops of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts were separated by a strip only 12 km wide. Stalin suggested calling this operation "Iskra". From the point of view of military art, the concept of a new operation was not distinguished by sophistication. It was planned only a new offensive "on the forehead" on the prepared defenses of the enemy. There was no provision for any possibility of maneuvering or bypassing the enemy. The Soviet troops were opposed by the 18th Army of General G. Lindemann, which consisted of 26 divisions. The enemy focused all his attention on the very Shlisselburg ledge, 12 km wide and about 15 km long, reasonably expecting the next offensive of the Red Army in this very place. During the 16 months of the blockade, the German troops turned this sector of the front into a real fortress, showing what the German soldier is capable of when he has enough time to create a long-term defense. All fortifications were maximally adapted to the terrain and were created with all German thoroughness and rationality. Given that the entire territory of the ledge was a wetland, any slightest hill was turned into a stronghold of defense, armed with a large number of artillery, mortars and machine guns. Where the soil allowed, trenches and communication passages were created, connecting strong points with special cut-off positions in case the enemy broke through them. In the swampy areas, where it was impossible to dig trenches, the German soldiers erected wooden-earth ramparts that served as protection from fire and covered the maneuver with reserves. Front line in the west. It passed along the left bank of the Neva, the height of the bank reached 12-14 m and was literally stuffed with camouflaged firing points

355

river, but also the opposite bank to a considerable depth. Preparing for defense, the enemy flooded the shore with water, turning its slopes into a solid and thick crust of ice. No need to speak

It can be assumed that the defense system in both directions included numerous minefields, ditches, blockages and other obstacles. The approaches to the front line were long ago and reliably targeted by all fire weapons.

It was this zone that the troops of the two fronts had to break through for the third time with counter strikes. On the sector of the Leningrad Front (commander - Lieutenant General L.A. Gorov), the 67th Army of Lieutenant General M.P. Dukhanov (6 rifle divisions, 6 rifle and 3 tank brigades, 22 artillery and mortar regiments). The Volkhov Front (commander - General of the Army K.A. Meretskov) singled out the same infamous 2nd shock army, Lieutenant General V.3, for the strike. Romanovsky (11 rifle divisions, 4 rifle and 4 tank brigades). The actions of the troops were to be covered by the aviation of the two air armies and the heavy artillery of the Baltic Fleet (commander - Vice Admiral V.F. Tributs).

The preparations for Operation Iskra were carried out with unprecedented scope and thoroughness. It was, perhaps, the most prepared operation of the Red Army of all that had been carried out before. Reconnaissance for a long time revealed all the enemy firing points, the entire front line of the enemy defense was filmed and studied. Hundreds of observation and sound-measuring posts were built. Special assault groups were created in the troops, which practiced tactics for capturing enemy strongholds and overcoming various obstacles. A special technique was worked out for overcoming friendly and enemy minefields.

A concentrated artillery group provided previously unheard-of fire densities - 146-180 guns and mortars per 1 km of the front. The advancing divisions received 222 and 217 tanks to support them, respectively. Air defense tasks, in addition to fighter aviation, were to be solved by three anti-aircraft artillery divisions and six separate anti-aircraft divisions.

356

DIVISIONOVV. The front commanders worked out the issues of interaction and, according to General Meretskov, "understood each other perfectly." For the general coordination of the efforts of the two fronts and the Baltic Fleet, two representatives of the Headquarters arrived from Moscow at once - General G.K. Zhukov and Marshal K.E. In Roshilov. It seemed that now nothing could stop the victorious offensive of the Soviet troops.

The offensive began on 12 January. The enemy position was hit by a fire attack of incredible power - for every square meter of the enemy's defense, 2-3 shells fell. On the first day of the offensive, formations of the 67th Army managed to capture two bridgeheads on the left bank of the Neva and, in some places, the first line of trenches. The successes of the divisions of the Volkhov Front were also rather modest. A deep breakthrough in the enemy's defenses failed. As a result, for the next six days, the advancing troops had to "gnaw through" the defenses of the

tivnik. Only on January 18 did the advanced units of the 67th and 2nd shock armies join in the area of Workers' settlement No. 5. The blockade has been broken! On the same day, the State Defense Committee adopted a special resolution on the construction of a railway on the liberated shore of Lake Ladoga. It was built in just 19 days, and in the Shlisselburg area, a bridge across the Neva was built in just 7 days.

But the successes of the Soviet troops ended there. The combined efforts of the two fronts managed to capture only a narrow - only 8-11 km - strip of the shore of Lake Ladoga. An attempt to move further south and capture the Sinyavin Heights on the move was repulsed by the enemy. Moreover, having retained these heights dominating the area, the German troops were able to carry out artillery shelling of the built railway and the bridge across the Neva. The Headquarters, disappointed by the very modest results of such a long and thoroughly prepared operation, firmly ordered the destruction of the enemy's Sinyavin grouping by flank strikes - strikes from two fronts. During February, the armies of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts continued their attempts to break through the enemy defenses, but to no avail.

357

From the memoirs of a Wehrmacht officer G. Biedermann:

"Suddenly, the silence was torn by a heavy machine gun "MO" with a tearing eardrum roar, followed by a cry: "Alarm! Ivan! The corporal pulled the trigger of the MS-42, firing fast, short bursts into the twilight, and was joined by a heavy MO at the edge of the woods. Between bursts of "MS" the crackling of rifle shots was heard. In response, there was a soft drum roll of the Soviet "maxims", to which the piercing shots of the ubiquitous Soviet machine guns were connected ... The forest was teeming with Bolsheviks. At first we noticed them 30 meters in front of our positions, which caused the crackling of branches and the crunch of ice under the feet of dozens, maybe hundreds of heavy Russian boots through the undergrowth ...

In short breaks from the roar of machine-gun fire, one could hear shouts of "Hurrah! Hurrah!" and after a few seconds of firing, those cries turned into moans as the dead, wounded and dying fell into the snow in front of our trenches. In front of our machine-gun positions piled up mountains of bodies dressed in light brown and white camouflage uniforms, and new Russians filled in the gaps that tore our hot barrels out in the attacking masses. The forest in front of us turned into a shooting range full of targets. There was no need to look for targets, because the Russians themselves rushed to our trenches. Skipping, dodging, shooting, shouting, they rushed forward. Despite the boundless horror that seized them, the grenadiers remained in their positions, not succumbing to panic ... the Soviet attack took a sip of just six meters from the barrels of our bullets

meth..."!

Already at the very beginning of the operation, it became clear that, despite

all the seriousness of the preparation, intelligence did not reveal the enemy's defenses. As a result, neither artillery nor aircraft were able to completely suppress the fire system, and the advancing troops immediately stumbled upon dagger fire from disguised firing points. Their suppression by aimed fire had not been worked out by the beginning of the offensive. The rear services failed again. Although the advancing units advanced only 5-7 km, they remained

, Biderman G. Decree. op. pp. 182-184.

358

without hot food, the evacuation of the wounded to the rear proved to be an impossible task. With very modest results, the losses turned out to be very heavy. During the entire period of the operation, the troops of the two fronts lost 115,082 people (irretrievable losses - 33,940 soldiers and officers), 41 tanks, 417 guns and mortars, 41 aircraft.

Summing up the results of the operation, the commander of the troops of the Leningrad Front, General L.A. Govorov quite rightly came to the conclusion: "Where the battle is organized, the units suffer minimal losses. Anyone who allows unjustified losses and thereby deprives his part of the combat capability, failing to complete the task, commits a crime. Army commanders under personal responsibility not to allow attacks without reconnaissance of the enemy and not provided with fire»> 2.

- "Demyansk cauldron". A situation very similar to the "Sinyavino ledge" has developed in the zone of the North-Western Front, where the so-called "Demyansky cauldron" has existed for almost a year. It was formed during the offensive of the Red Army in January 1942, part of the forces of the German 16th Army fell into a semi-encirclement. Communication with the main forces was maintained along a corridor 28 km long and only 6-12 km wide. Despite the complexity of the situation, the German command managed to organize the supply of troops with everything necessary, using ground communications and transport aviation, which made up to 150 sorties a day and delivered 250 tons of cargo?. Occupying an area of about 500 sq. km, the bridgehead went into the depths of the Soviet defense for 80 km, dangerously hanging over the flanks of the Northwestern and Kalinin fronts.

For the Soviet troops, this foothold turned out to be a real "bone in the throat". On the bridgehead itself there were only six German divisions, five more provided a corridor, connecting

. See Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 283, 485. ? See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. P.212.

3 This data shows how important THIS "air bridge" was for the German troops. However, the Soviet command did not even try to destroy it by air blockade, preferring the tried and tested method

repeated ground assaults.

359

sew it with the main forces. On the Soviet side, the foothold was blocked by four armies! Near Demyansk, the German command showed an example of how it is really necessary to pin down enemy forces, while limiting themselves to minimal losses of their soldiers.

In mid-October 1942, the commander of the North-Western Front instead of General P.A. Kurochkin was appointed Marshal S.K. Timoshenko. In July, he was relieved of his post as commander of the Stalingrad Front and assigned to a more "calm" sector, which was well known to the marshal - he had previously been the Stavka representative on this front. Already in mid-October, the plan for a new operation was ready, but the enemy, discovering the preparation of the offensive, launched a preemptive strike. I had to start all over. The concept of the new operation was not original and repeated the same idea - a strike on the corridor connecting the bridgehead, in its narrowest place. In this respect, it was a repetition of the Sinyavin operation of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts. As on the Sinya Vinsky ledge, the wooded and swampy terrain greatly contributed to the defense. The Germans turned the defended territory into a real fortress, full of field-type structures - earthen ramparts, trenches, bunkers, ditches, barbed wire fences, minefields. Of course, the enemy was expecting another blow in this very place, and there was no need to talk about any kind of surprise.

The offensive began on 28 November. The attacks on the enemy defenses that lasted for a week gave an insignificant result - the depth of advance was only 2-7 km. It became clear that there was no prospect of further continuation of the offensive. But Marshal S.K. Timoshenko, having asked the Headquarters for reinforcements - five divisions, four brigades and three tank regiments, prepared a new blow all along the same corridor. The next offensive began on December 23 and lasted for 20 days. The result turned out to be practically the same - the formations of the front advanced 6-7 km and were stopped by the approaching reserves. Just a week later, having received new reserves, Timoshenko sent his armies to storm the ill-fated measles

360

dora on the same directions of strikes, with the same composition of the troops. Exhausted, thinned out, demoralized by the heaviest and ineffectual losses, the divisions and regiments began another "gnawing through" the enemy's defenses. But in five days they could not move forward. On January 25, the front, having exhausted all its resources, stopped. The "offensive" died out by itself. An obvious crisis set in, and further continuation of the "operation" became downright criminal. But not when "the best Soviet commander" planned. new

strike on 1 February'.

However, this time Stalin finally had doubts about the advisability of continuing this operation. It was decided to prepare a larger-scale operation with the most decisive goals, which later received the code name "Polar Star". Stalin's choice of the name of this operation had a clear analogy with the just begun Operation Zvezda, which provided for the encirclement of a large enemy grouping in the Kharkov industrial region, and testified to the similarity of the concept - it was planned to repeat the large-scale success of the offensive on the Don. The importance of the upcoming operation was evidenced by the fact that the coordination of the efforts of the three fronts was entrusted to three representatives of the Headquarters at once - Marshal of the Soviet Union G.K., who had just received new ranks. Zhukov and Marshal of Artillery N.N. Voronov ?, as well as the commander of the Red Army Air Force, General A.A. Novikov. It was understood that their presence was supposed to ensure an appropriate level of coordination of the actions of combined arms formations, artillery and aviation. The role of the main striking force was to be performed by

! Historiographers do not give an explanation for this amazing persistence of S.K. Timoshenko in the Demyansk operation. It seems that, nevertheless, the main reason for this was the personal motive of the marshal, who sought to regain Stalin's favor after the most severe catastrophe on the Southwestern Front in May-June 1942, of which Timoshenko was directly guilty.

? By decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of January 18, 1943, General of the Army G.K. Zhukov received the rank of Marshal of the Soviet Union, Colonel General of Artillery N.N. Voronov - the rank of Marshal of Artillery. (See: Russian archive: Great Patriotic War: Orders of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR (1943-1945 - T. 13 (2-3). - M.: TERRA, 1997. S. 35)

361

rative group of General M.S. Khozin, which included the 68th General Army (commander - Lieutenant General F.I. Tolbukhin) and the 1st Tank Army (commander - Lieutenant General M.E. Katukov).

The Northwestern and Volkhov fronts were to deliver a powerful blow in the general direction to Pskov and Narva, while the Leningrad front was to advance towards them. The success of this offensive was to finally destroy the Demyansk Cauldron in one fell swoop and encircle the main forces of the 18th German Army, which continued the blockade of Leningrad. The plan of this grandiose operation was distinguished by its scale, and boldness, and a kind of elegance of operational design, which made it possible to solve the problems of both the Sinyavinsky salient and the Demyansky cauldron with one blow.

From the memoirs of Marshal of the Armored Forces M.E. Katukov:

"Our group of troops was supposed to enter the gap created by

ny 1st shock. Let me remind you that the army included airborne divisions and ski brigades. They were supposed to drop troops into the area of the Dno railway junction and launch an offensive against Pskov. On the same direction, it was planned to bring into battle separate tank regiments and part of the artillery available in the army.

Developing the offensive, the paratroopers, skiers and other troops were obliged to go to the Pskov and Peipsi lakes and gain a foothold on the coast. Having completed the task, they formed a barrier facing the front to the west. The purpose of the barrier is to deprive the enemy of the opportunity to throw up reinforcements for his cut off Leningrad grouping.

Meanwhile, the main blow was delivered by the tank and mechanized corps in cooperation with the 1st shock army. Sweeping away the resistance of the Nazis on the way, they rapidly advanced through Luga to the shores of the Baltic and then, having reached the sea coast, sharply turned to the east and with all their might attacked the encircled Leningrad grouping of enemy troops!

Part of the operation "Polar Star" was supposed to be but

1 Katukov M.E. Decree. op. S. 193.

362

a strike by the five armies of the North-Western Front with a fir-tree deep encirclement of the main forces of the 16th Army, which still held the Demyansk Cauldron. But the transfer of additional front forces to the breakthrough site was delayed, and Marshal S.K. Timoshenko decided to strike directly at the same "sworn" corridor with the available forces of the 11th, 34th and 53rd armies on February 15th in order to break through the enemy's defenses and create an inner encirclement ring. Five days later the 1st Shock and 27th Armies were to go on the offensive in order to break through and create an outer encirclement. But these calculations of the commander and headquarters of the North-Western Front did not come true. The blow along the corridor was only a repetition of the nightmare of the previous months - the armies advanced only 2-2.5 km, and the offensive fizzled out. ,

In the meantime, the enemy, having uncovered in time the preparations for a large offensive by the Red Army, on February 17 began a secret withdrawal of troops from the "Demyansk Cauldron" and a general withdrawal of the 16th Army to the previously prepared defensive lines along the river. Lovat. In addition to all the mistakes and miscalculations made by the front command, reconnaissance discovered the enemy's withdrawal only on the third day. The next mistake of the front headquarters was the conclusion that this was a forced retreat under the blows of the 11th and 34th armies, as a result of which the most advantageous moment of transition to a general offensive was missed, when the enemy, hiding behind only weak rearguards on the retreat, was most vulnerable . As a result of this mistake, the 1st shock army went on the offensive only on February 26 and reached the river. Catch a day after

after the German 16th Army had already taken over the defensive lines. Attempts to break through it "on the move" were repulsed. March 4 troops four

The Recharms again fell upon the German defenses and were again forced to retreat. Twice more Timoshenko's troops tried to break through the line along the river. Lovat. The result of these efforts was the advance of another 10-12 km. In mid-March, the troops went on the defensive. After the failure near Demyansk, the Polar Star operation lost all meaning - the German grouping got out of the planned strike.

The "Demyansky cauldron", or, as the enemy called it, "small Verdun", put an end to the military career of Marshal S.K. Timoshenko. He was soon released from command

363

front, and Stalin no longer trusted the direct command of the troops to the former people's commissar of defense'. For more than a year, the troops of two Soviet fronts tried to liquidate this bridgehead. Seven (!) large-scale front-line offensive operations lasting from one to three weeks were prepared and carried out. Only in four of them, the largest, the losses of the Red Army amounted to 107,190 dead and 198,592 wounded, not counting the losses in those nicklezes. Those. the struggle for this piece of land cost the Soviet troops more than 300,000 killed and wounded, the army lost 30 fully equipped divisions! According to the enemy, his own losses near Demyansk in the autumn of 1942 - in the spring of 1943. amounted to about 63,600 people, of which 6,300 were irrevocable\*. Thus, there were more than 17 Soviet soldiers per dead German soldier. These aimless and unjustified losses had another consequence. The senselessly and criminally directed divisions by Marshal Timoshenko could be transferred to the South, where their appearance could become a decisive factor in the grandiose battle in the bend of the Don. It was on these days that the troops of General Vatutin had to repel Manstein's counterattack, the reserves were sorely lacking, the bill went literally to regiments and battalions. And Marshal Timoshenko threw division after division like a furnace. In terms of loss ratio, it was one of the bloodiest battles of the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War, and in terms of the level of military art, it was one of the most disastrous.

1 During the remainder of the war, Marshal Timoshenko served as a representative of the Headquarters. In March-June 1943, he coordinated the actions of the Volkhov and Leningrad Fronts, June-December 1943 - the North Caucasian Front and the Black Sea Fleet, in February - June 1944 - the 2nd and 3rd Baltic Fronts, from August 1944 until the end of the war - the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Ukrainian fronts.

2 Operations to liquidate the Demyansk bridgehead were carried out in May - early June, July 17-24, August 10-24, September 15-28, November 28 - December 5, 1942 and February 15-28, 1943.

3 Calculated according to: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 1.S. 224;



Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 311,313.

4 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 1. S. 330.

364

On the central direction. In the series of planned operations at the beginning of 1943, the most grandiose was to be the operation against the main forces of Army Group Center—two tank and two field armies. The plan of this operation provided for deep coverage and encirclement of the enemy in the areas of Bryansk and Vyazma by joint actions of five fronts. In a sense, this plan was a mirror reflection of the encirclement of the troops of the Western and Bryansk fronts in the same areas in the autumn of 1941. The scale of the operation was such that it could only be carried out in stages, successively shifting the direction of the main attack from south to north. The first stage of the operation envisaged the encirclement and destruction of the Oryol group of the enemy, at the second stage it was planned to destroy the 2nd German Panzer Army in the Bryansk region. The final blow was to destroy that same Rzhev-Vyazemsky ledge (or "balcony", as the Germans called it), which the Soviet troops unsuccessfully assaulted twice in the summer - autumn of 1942, and culminate in the Red Army's exit to Smolensk.

A feature of this impressive concept and its most vulnerable link was the complexity of coordination and the need for a rigid sequence of operations. At the same time, the success of the previous one was not an indispensable condition for the implementation of the next stage. In addition, the plan provided for the need to create and bring into battle a whole new front - the Central. It was supposed to advance in the resulting gap between the Voronezh and Bryansk fronts, the directions of the blows of which diverged in different directions. To do this, it was necessary to transfer the troops of the Don Front, released after the liquidation of the Paulus army, from near Stalingrad in the Kastornoye region, transferred. to the Central Front.

As in the planning of other operations, the deadlines for preparation were the shortest, and therefore unrealistic. On

- This time the Stavka set tasks for the fronts in early February, and already on February 12, the Bryansk Front was to launch an offensive, on February 15 - Central. For relocation and

| 365

the deployment of its formations was given less than two weeks. The upcoming operation was extremely complicated by the fact that the German command, having assessed the threat to its Oryol grouping in time, also began to transfer reserves in order to organize a powerful counterattack by the forces of the 2nd Panzer

army. Thus, from the very beginning, everything depended on which of the opponents would quickly carry out the maneuver with reserves. In this struggle, the initial advantage was on the side of the German army, which had at its disposal a communication network debugged during the year of occupation. At the same time, the Soviet troops had to relocate and deploy on the territory where the fighting had just ended, where the retreating enemy had destroyed everything that was possible - bridges, access roads, railway tracks, station equipment, rolling stock, etc. d. Once again, the weather factor was not taken into account when preparing the operation plan. And it turned out to be very unfavorable - the February blizzards and snowfalls created huge drifts on the roads, disrupted the schedule for the advance of troops, disrupted their supply.

Still, the attack went according to plan. The troops of the Bryansk Front were the first to go on the offensive in the Oryol direction, without having time to complete their preparations. It immediately became clear that the enemy was faster this time too in deploying new reserves. As a result, after two weeks of heavy fighting, the advancing armies were able to advance 10-30 km. The offensive of the Western Front turned out to be more successful, where the 16th Army of General I.Kh Bagramyan managed to break through the enemy's main line of defense in the most difficult battles on February 22-27, but its forces were no longer enough to further advance. The main hope was now pinned on the offensive of the Central Front. However, the calculations of the Headquarters and the General Staff for the redeployment of three combined arms and one tank army at a distance of almost 600 km turned out to be absolutely utopian.

From the memoirs of Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky: "My arguments about the unreality of this period did not convince the Headquarters ... From the very first moment we faced enormous difficulties. We had the only one at our disposal.

366

line railway, which had been restored by this time. She, of course, could not cope with the transfer of a huge number of troops. Transportation plans were bursting at the seams. The schedule was broken. Applications for echelons were not satisfied, and if trains were submitted, it turned out that the cars were not suitable for transporting personnel and horses.

The NKVD was instructed to take measures to speed up the transfer of troops. Employees of this People's Commissariat, zealously

, shy to complete the task, overdid it and produced for a month there was such pressure on the railway administration that it was completely at a loss. And if before that there was still some kind of schedule, now there is no trace of it left. Mixed formations began to arrive in the area of concentration. The material part of the artillery was unloaded as intended, but the horses and vehicles were still in place ... The concentration area, just liberated from the enemy, was not prepared

and equipped to receive a large mass of troops, military equipment and materiel. Work on the creation of bases, transport routes and the organization of rears had to be carried out in parallel with preparations for the offensive ...

Numerous columns of troops, trucks and combat vehicles with great difficulty moved from the unloading station to the west along the only auto-drawn road ... Due to the lack of vehicles and horses by Tatk, soldiers were often forced to carry heavy machine guns, anti-tank rifles, and often mortars . Artillery lagged behind the troops ...

All this ultimately led to the fact that the troops of the newly organized Central Front were unable to concentrate at the appointed time. The start of the offensive was postponed to February 25..."

The main strike force of the Central Front, the 2nd Panzer Army, having made a 300 km march across winter impassability, lost more than half of its tanks on the road - 226 out of 408.

` Offensive. Rifle divisions of the 65th army of General P.I. Ba

ma

' Rokossovsky K.K. Decree. op. pp. 242-244.

367

Tova did what seemed impossible - they broke through the enemy defenses only with their own means, advancing 20-25 km. The front commander threw into the gap his only ready reserve - the cavalry rifle group of General V.V. Kryukov (cavalry corps and two ski brigades). The cavalry under these conditions turned out to be the most mobile and effective. Kryukov's group passed 120 km behind enemy lines and managed to cut the Bryansk-Konotop railway, one of the main lines of communications of the 2nd German Panzer Army. But the blow of the enemy reserves led to the encirclement of the corps, with heavy fighting and losses, the cavalry still managed to break through to the main forces. The enemy offensive against Kharkov, which began soon, forced the Stavka to transfer the 21st Army from the Central Front to the south, which made it impossible to continue the offensive. At the end of March, the troops of the Bryansk and Central Fronts went over to the defensive. In the course of the failed offensive, the troops of the two fronts lost 70,407 men killed and wounded, irretrievable losses amounted to 30,439 soldiers and officers.

° The unsuccessful attack on Orel called into question the prospect of an attack on the Rzhev-Vyazemsky salient. However, the blows of the Bryansk and Central fronts forced the German command to transfer part of the forces defending the ledge, and the situation began to change in a favorable way for the Soviet troops.

side. Already on February 18, reconnaissance of the Western Front, and then the Kalinin Front, discovered the redeployment of German troops. The headquarters ordered to accelerate the preparation of the planned offensive in order to encircle the main forces of the 9th and 4th German armies. On the night of March 2, the situation changed once again - the German troops began to secretly leave their positions, leaving the Rzhev-Vyazemsky "balcony". The headquarters ordered the start of an energetic pursuit in order to prevent the planned withdrawal of enemy troops from the threat of encirclement. Formations of the Western (commander - Colonel General V.D. Sokolovsky) and Kalinin (commander - Colonel General M.A. Purkaev) fronts began pursuit from the retreating enemy. But to solve the set Bet for

368

could not give. German troops, skillfully hiding behind the rear guards, retreated to the west. At the same time, a whole system of obstacles was created along the withdrawal routes, relying on which the rearguard units held back the advancing Soviet troops. As a result, the connection of the two fronts, at best, simply "pushed out" the enemy. The headquarters demanded decisive action, and in the second half of March, the commander of the Western Front, General V.D. Sokolovsky tried to cut off the retreating German troops with a flank attack by the 1st and 5th tank corps. But the only result of numerous attacks was the loss by the hulls of most of their vehicles - 132 tanks. The enemy, without stopping the withdrawal of troops, brutally and skillfully repulsed the attacks of Soviet tankmen.

On March 24, the armies of both fronts reached the enemy's defensive line along the Dnieper, their further advance was stopped. The result of the offensive in the western direction was the advance of the Soviet troops to a depth of 130-160 km, the liberation of a number of regions of the Kalinin and Smolensk regions. The total losses of the Red Army in the Rzhev-Vyazemsky operation amounted to 138,577 soldiers and officers, of which 38,862 shimi died. Overall, well thought out and grandiose. the operation to defeat the enemy troops in the Bryansk and Smolensk directions failed. The enemy, on the contrary, managed to solve a number of important tasks: he managed to withdraw more than 20 divisions from the salient, reduce the line of defense by 350 km and transfer 15 divisions to the reserve of the High Command.

Results and lessons of the winter offensive of 1942-1943. By the end of March, the winter campaign of 1942-1943, which began with the brilliant breakthrough of the Red Army at Stalingrad, ended. 11 front-line formations of the Red Army from 12, 49 general shackles, 3 tank and 13 air armies participated in the offensive operations of this campaign. As a result, the total length of the offensive front reached 1,700 km. The cardinal difference of this campaign from the previous ones was

`The fact that the Red Army for the first time managed to carry out successful

<sup>1</sup> See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 313.

369

strategic operations (Stalingrad and Voronezh-Kharkov), as a result of which large enemy groupings were surrounded and destroyed, gigantic gaps were formed in its defense, which there was nothing to fill. It was a demonstration of the military art of a new level for the Soviet command, quite comparable with the best examples of Wehrmacht operations in 1941-1942.

But at the same time, there were still many "diseases" of 1941 in the actions of the Soviet command and the Red Army as a whole. troops and the ability to counter the enemy. In practically all strategic and frontline operations, the capabilities of friendly troops were overestimated, while the enemy's ability to resist was stubbornly underestimated. The consequence of this was the "unexpectedly" effective defense of the enemy in the North Caucasus, the Sinyavinsky ledge, in the "Demyansky cauldron" and the Rzhev-Vyazemsky "balcony". And the counterattack of Manshtey near Kharkov and Belgorod became a complete surprise.

The underestimation of the enemy was also reflected in the stubborn desire to attack on all fronts at once in the hope that the enemy was already morally suppressed and was about to "run". In a word, the mistakes of the winter offensive of 1942 were almost completely repeated. While the concentration of all possible reserves in the south could indeed lead to the complete collapse of this flank of the German front. In this regard, the plan to use M.E. Katukov in the swamps near Demyansk, while the success of the tank corps on the Don showed directly where its strike force was to be used.

°

And the Soviet high command turned out to be incapable of a wide maneuver by the forces of the fronts, preferring to throw into battle only those reserves that were already concentrated in advance on

370

certain areas. As a result, a situation arose when in the decisive direction near Kharkov, the regiments and brigades were counted, and around the Rzhev-Vyazemsky "balcony" several tank corps were uselessly trampling around, in the swamps near Demyansk, an entire tank army was stuck, which included more tanks than the entire German Army Group Don!

From the memoirs of Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky:

"... I involuntarily thought about the reasons for the many defeats of the Soviet troops over the past period, in particular in the operation associated with the loss of Kharkov and Belgorod. In my opinion, this happened because our Supreme High Command, when conducting an offensive or defensive operation, did not pay due attention to the timely creation of the necessary reserves, during the offensive all forces were expended to the limit, the front was pulled into a thread, breaking away from its bases. The capabilities of the enemy and the state of their troops were not taken into account. Desire prevailed over possibilities...

The absence of operational reserves in the depths of our defense allowed the enemy, after breaking through the front in narrow sectors, to go with impunity to a deep encirclement of Soviet troops, and, having surrounded, to destroy them without hindrance ... |

I believed that the control of the fronts should be carried out from the center - by the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command and the General Staff. They also coordinate the actions of the fronts, for which the General Staff exists. Already the first months of the war showed the futility of the created improvised operational command bodies of the "directions", which united the management of several fronts. These "directions" were quite rightly eliminated. Why, then, did the Headquarters again begin to use the same thing, but under a different name - the representative of the Headquarters for coordinating the actions of the two fronts? Such a representative, being with the commander of one of the fronts, most often, interfering in the actions of the front,

.Changed it. At the same time, he did not bear any responsibility for the state of affairs, which was completely assigned to the front commander, who often received conflicting orders

371

on one and the same question: from the Headquarters - one thing, and from its representative - another. The latter, being in the capacity of a coordinator at one of the fronts, naturally showed a great interest in bringing as many forces and means as possible to where he himself was. This was most often done to the detriment of other fronts, which had to carry out no less complex operations.

From the memoirs of General S.M. Shtemenko:

"After the abolition of the main commands in the directions, the need for live communication between the Headquarters and the General Staff with the fronts increased even more. Coordination of combat actions of the fronts, control over the execution of directives of the Supreme High Command, assistance to them in planning, preparing and carrying out operations with decisive goals - all this required systematic visits to the place of responsible persons capable of independently making important decisions and giving appropriate

relevant instructions. It was then, in fact, that the already well-known ... institute of representatives of the Stavka arose.

Most often, the Stavka was represented on the ground by the first deputy of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief G.K. Zhukov and Chief of the General Staff A.M. Vasilevsky. Some of the then commanders of the fronts later claimed that the constant presence of Zhukov or Vasilevsky next to them had a negative effect on the leadership of the troops. There may be some truth in this criticism (mainly post-war). But on the whole, we think, the activities of the Stavka representatives justified themselves. The situation required the presence on the fronts of persons who would have the experience and power to quickly resolve the most important issues, often beyond the competence of the front commander. Continuous work directly in the active army, in the main directions of G.K. Zhukov was determined primarily by his position as First Deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief. As for A.M. Vasilevsky, then, of course, he should have been in Gel

' Rokossovsky K.K. Decree. op. pp. 252-254.

372

nerve headquarters. But the Supreme Commander-in-Chief did not consult anyone on this matter. Considering, apparently, such a situation is normal, I.V. Stalin almost always, at the first meeting with Vasilevsky and Zhukov, upon returning from the front, asked them how soon they were thinking of leaving for the front again.

An unforgivable and inexplicable mistake was the Stavka's consent to the suicidal attacks of Marshal Timoshenko's troops against the German defense at the Demyansk bridgehead. Those reserves that could well play a decisive role in the destruction of the German Army Group A in the North Caucasus and the Don Group on the outskirts of the Dnieper were destroyed thoughtlessly, without results and in the most criminal way near Demyansk.

Even in the winter of 1943, the best commanders from among the marshal constellation of the Red Army - Konev, Govorov, Meretskov still could not free themselves from the attractive simplicity of "frontal assaults", although the tactics of detours and envelopments had already given amazing results in the Don steppes.

Fortunately, commanders who were several steps below learned much faster. During the winter offensive in the south, the commanders of corps, divisions, brigades, regiments and battalions demonstrated dozens of examples of brilliant tactical skill, surpassing the enemy in the use of his favorite weapon - a deep tank strike. Even the cavalry of the Red Army in a number of cases proved to be extremely effective under the command of bold and enterprising commanders.

But still, the main result was that the winter campaign

The war as a whole ended in an undeniable victory for the Red Army. The enemy was forced to leave the territory with an area of more than 480 thousand square meters. km, unable to retain even the milestones achieved in 1942, the Wehrmacht suffered heavy losses. About 100 divisions - almost 40% of all his formations - were defeated, the total losses in the dead, wounded and captured amounted to about 1.7 million people. The German army lost over 3,500 tanks, 24,000 guns and 4,300 combat aircraft.

<sup>1</sup> Shtemenko S.M. Decree. op. pp. 113-114.  
? See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 243.

373

These were losses from which the Wehrmacht could not recover. In fact, his strength broke in the winter battles of 1942-1943. and could not recover. The final turning point took place in the summer of 1943 in the course of an attempt by the German command to take revenge.

#### VICTORY ON THE KURSK DUGA

At the end of March 1943, a short-term lull was established on the entire more than 2,000 km long Soviet-German front. Both sides were forced to take a break after intense winter battles - the losses in both men and equipment turned out to be too heavy. But the headquarters did not stop their work on the development of plans for a new campaign. The command of both the Wehrmacht and the Red Army realized that the upcoming summer battles were to be a turning point.

The configuration of the front line, which had taken shape by the end of the winter campaign, had one feature that attracted the attention of the General Staff officers on both sides. A deep ledge in the area of Orel, Kursk, Belgorod (later called the "Kursk Bulge"), dangerously hanging over the flanks of the German army groups "Center" and "South", gave the Soviet command an excellent opportunity to deliver an enveloping strike with a turn to the south or north. But the German command also had the opportunity to encircle the main forces of the two Soviet fronts with a classic strike under the base of the ledge, which could lead to the destruction of the entire central part of the Red Army front.

It was this prospect that had a decisive influence on the preparation of the German plan for the summer offensive, for it alone promised revenge for Stalingrad. The new operation was named "Citadel".

From Hitler's operational order, April 15, 1943:

"This offensive is of decisive importance. It must end with a swift and decisive success...



give us the initiative for the spring and summer of this year. In connection with

374

Therefore, all preparatory measures should be carried out with the greatest care and energy. In the direction of the main attacks, the best formations, the best weapons, the best commanders and a large amount of ammunition must be used. Every commander, every rank and file must be imbued with the consciousness of the decisive significance of this offensive. The victory at Kursk must be a torch for the whole world. Almost all possible reserves of the Wehrmacht were transferred to Kursk. On the flanks of the Kursk ledge, powerful strike groups were created. On the northern side, the strike force of the Army Group Center included 22 divisions (8 tank divisions), on the southern flank, in the Army Group South, 19 divisions (9 tank divisions) were allocated for the strike. The new plan of the German command was an attempt to repeat the best examples of 1941-1942, but there was also a significant difference - it soon became clear that the Soviet command was able to determine the direction of this strike and the formations of the Red Army began building a powerful defensive line. Indeed, the Central (commander - General of the Army K.K. Rokossovsky) and Voronezh (commander - General of the Army N.F. Vatutin) fronts, which covered the Kursk salient, received by that time the task, using defense in depth, to wear down and bleed the enemy strike groups, thus creating the conditions for a transition to a decisive offensive. But the Soviet command also did not have a unity of views. N.F. Vatutin and Commander of the Southern Front, Colonel-General R.Ya. Malinovsky persistently offered to launch a preemptive strike in the direction of the Donbass. Stalin hesitated, he was impressed by the offensive mood of the commanders. Noting this inclination of Stalin to active actions, Marshal G.K. Zhukov later recalled: "The basic laws of the operational-strategic art of I.V. Stalin did not adhere. He was like a temperamental fist fighter, often getting excited and in a hurry to join the battle. Hot and in a hurry, I.V. Sta-

"Ling did not always correctly take into account the time required for everything  
ie about:

' See: Great Patriotic... S. 252.

375

third-party preparation of the operation! But this time caution prevailed, and Stalin leaned towards the point of view of G.K. Zhukov and A.M. Vasilevsky, who insisted on the need to meet the attack of the enemy with a pre-prepared defense, backed up by powerful reserves in depth. In mid-April, the General Staff began developing an operation, the first stage of which

watched the defense of the Kursk ledge, and at the second stage it was supposed to carry out two independent operations: "Kutu Call" - to defeat the enemy near Orel and "Commander Rumyantsev" - the destruction of the Belgorod-Kharkov grouping.

Sharp disagreements arose among the German generals as well. The main opponent of the Citadel plan was E. Manstein and the command of Army Group South. "We proposed," Manstein himself later recalled, "during the expected enemy attack on the Donbass, we retreat with fighting and let the enemy armies go west approximately to the Melitopol-Dnepropetrovsk line. At the same time, we had to prepare a large force in the rear of the northern flank of the army group. These forces were to defeat the enemy advancing there, in order to strike from there to the southeast or south into the deep flank of the enemy armies advancing through the Donbass to the lower Dnieper, and destroy them on the coast"?.

The experienced commander suggested, abandoning the offensive, "to catch the enemy in a counterattack" - to repeat his recent success near Kharkov, but on a larger scale. Manstein was not alone. One of the tank generals of the Wehrmacht, Friedrich Mellenthin, later noted that the shortcomings of the Citadel offensive plan were quite obvious: "the German army listed all its advantages associated with conducting maneuver operations, and had to fight the Russians in their chosen positions. But the campaign of 1941 and 1942 proved that our tank troops actually did not know defeat if they got the opportunity to maneuver freely in the vast expanses of Russia. Instead of

1 Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. P. 58. ?  
Manstein E. Decree. op. pp. 513-514.

376

try to create conditions for maneuver through a strategic retreat and surprise strikes on quiet sectors of the front, the German command did not think of anything better than to throw our wonderful tank divisions into the Kursk salient, which by that time had become the strongest fortress in the world.

But Hitler was inexorable - offensive and only offensive! The secret of Hitler's surprisingly constant insensitivity to the opinion of military experts was explained by the fact that he, despite his experience as a soldier in the First World War, still remained a politician. As in the case of the Paulus army, so this time for Hitler the most important was the political aspect of the forthcoming operation. In his speech on the eve of its beginning, he bluntly stated that the success of the Citadel would have not only military, but also political significance: it would help Germany to keep the allies and frustrate the plans of the Western powers to create a second front, and would have a positive effect on the internal situation of the Third Reich. It should be reminded

and the fact that it was at this time that the Wehrmacht troops suffered a severe defeat in North Africa. On May 13, the German-Italian Army Group Africa, surrounded in Tunisia, capitulated. Up to 240 thousand people were captured, half of them were German soldiers and officers. The Tunisian catastrophe ended the Italo-German epic in North Africa. During the period from December 1940 to May 1942, according to Allied estimates, Italian and German troops lost a total of 625,000 soldiers and officers, 7,596 aircraft, 2,100 tanks, and 650 merchant ships. In addition, in East Africa, the Italians lost 150 thousand people<sup>2</sup>.

| It was necessary to urgently restore the prestige of the Wehrmacht, seriously damaged as a result of military disasters in 1943, Ver

Give the German soldier a sense of his own superiority. 1 Mellenthin F. Decree. op. S. 271.

\* See Correspondence of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR with the Presidents United States and British Prime Ministers during the Great Patriotic War. M. 1976.V.2. pp. 64-65.

377

va. These tasks were to be carried out by an impressive demonstration. radio of military power.

It was this argument that became decisive in approving the plan for Operation Citadel. The German command had enough information about the depth of the Russian defense to the right. of the planned strike. In his order before the start of the operation, Hitler set the goal of crushing the Russian defenses on the most fortified sector of the front, thereby instilling in the enemy the idea that any resistance to the German military machine was useless.

th

From the order of A. Hitler before the start of Operation Citadel, July 3, 1943:

"Soldiers!

From today you are launching a major offensive, the outcome of which may be decisive for the war.

Your victory should, more than ever before, strengthen the conviction throughout the world that it is ultimately useless to offer any kind of resistance to the German army.

In addition, a new heavy defeat of the Russians will further undermine the already undermined in many Soviet units.

new faith in the possibility of success for the Bolsheviks. The day will come - and they, in spite of everything, as in the last war, will fall ... what has helped the Russians to achieve this or that success so far has been, first of all, their tanks.

My soldiers! Finally, you now have better tanks than them. Their seemingly inexhaustible manpower reserves are so worn out in two years of war that they have been forced to call on the youngest and the oldest. They are surpassed by our infantry, just as before, always - our artillery, our tank destroyers, our tankers, our sappers and, above all, our aviation had superiority.

The colossal blow that will hit the Soviet armies this morning must therefore shake them to their foundations.

And you must know that everything may depend on the success of this battle.

I myself, as a soldier, know very well what I am demanding of you, not

378

despite this, we must, no matter how bitter and difficult for everyone the war, in the end achieve victory.

It was no coincidence that Hitler emphasized the importance of tanks in the upcoming battle. The tank units of the Wehrmacht on the eve of "Tsit Delhi" received new heavy tanks R2-U1 "Tiger" and R2-U "Panther", which had powerful weapons and thick armor. It was on them that the hopes of the high command of the Wehrmacht were pinned - the new tanks were supposed to crack the Soviet defenses. In order to saturate the troops with new equipment, Hitler even postponed the start date of the operation by almost a month. But this circumstance played a fatal role - the Soviet troops completed the creation of defense in depth and prepared to repel the offensive.

By the time the operation "Citadel" began, the efforts of the Soviet troops had created an unprecedentedly powerful defense in the directions of the expected strike. Here, for the first time, the experience of defensive battles of the previous period was fully taken into account. The ease with which the German troops broke through the defenses of the Red Army was due to its insufficient depth and lack of reserves. The defending divisions, as a rule, were distributed evenly along the entire line of defense, due to the fact that the commanders tried to cover all sectors of the defense?. The enemy, on the other hand, concentrated his strike groups on breakthrough sectors, withdrawing troops from secondary sectors, and achieved a multiple superiority in both manpower and equipment. A paradoxical situation often arose - German troops,

: Quoted. Quoted from: "Arc of Fire": Battle of Kursk through the eyes of the Lubyanka. - M ..., 2003. pp. 288-289.

? Here it is necessary to note one more reason for such an organization.

rony. The concentration of the main forces in the most probable areas of defense Required a good organization of tactical and operational intelligence, aonav

ace Army of the period 1941-1942. remained frankly weak. And even if the reconnaissance managed to determine the direction of the enemy's attacks, the commander needed remarkable courage to expose the secondary sectors of the defense and strengthen it in the main direction. In the event that the intelligence data or the commander's calculations turned out to be incorrect, this could lead not only to the defeat of the troops, but also to the very likely reprisals of the FIS from the higher command.

379

yielding in total numbers to the units of the Red Army, they easily broke through its defenses.

, But during the period of preparation for the beginning of the summer campaign of 1943, it became obvious that a profound transformation was taking place in the Red Army, the result of which was a completely different preparation for a defensive operation. For the first time in the entire period of the war, instead of the usual one or two, less often three lines of defense with a depth of 15-40 km, formations of both the Central and Voronezh Fronts prepared eight lines and lines of defense with a total depth of up to 300 km.

Moreover, the commander of the Central Front, General K.K. Rokossovsky, having determined the most probable direction of the enemy's strike, concentrated 58% of rifle divisions, 87% of tanks, 70% of artillery on a front section of 95 km (31% of the entire length of the front line). The main front-line reserves were concentrated in the same direction - a tank army and two tank corps. "It was, of course, a risk," Marshal Rokossovsky himself later admitted. — The Nomes deliberately went for such a concentration of forces, confident that the enemy would use his favorite method — a blow with the main forces under the base of the ledge. Our reconnaissance and partisans confirmed that a powerful grouping of enemy troops was being created exactly in the direction where we expected! Commander of the Voronezh Front, General N.F. Vatutin believed that the enemy would be able to strike in three directions, and deployed his main forces on a 164-kilometer front. For the first time, a whole front was created in the rear of the defending troops as a reserve of Headquarters - Steпноy, numbering almost half a million soldiers and officers, more than 8 thousand guns and mortars, 1.4 thousand tanks. Such a colossal reserve was supposed to guarantee the Soviet defense against any accidents.

The troops of both fronts were specially trained to fight against

<sup>1</sup> Rokossovsky K.K. Decree. op. S. 257.

<sup>2</sup> See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. P. 255. As a result, the density of the defense of the troops of the Voronezh Front in the direction of the enemy's attack turned out to be much lower, which played a role in the course of the battle.

380

German tanks. The entire defense was built on the basis of anti-tank areas, all cannon and even howitzer artillery was prepared for direct fire at tanks. Special detachments of tank destroyers were created, provided with all the available arsenal of means, incl. and dogs specially trained to blow up tanks. Bomber and assault aircraft practiced tactics against tanks. It was armed with a new, previously unused secret weapon - special anti-tank cumulative bombs. One hit of such a bomb was enough to destroy any enemy tank. An IL-2 attack aircraft could drop 312 such bombs in one sortie. Firing lines for anti-tank ambushes were created along the entire depth of the defense, hundreds of kilometers of special barriers were built - ditches, pit traps, scarps, gouges, more than 1 million anti-tank mines were laid. Over 10,000 km of trenches and communication passages were dug in the defense zone of the Voronezh and Central Fronts.

Never before had German tanks encountered such a defense. In addition to everything, the Soviet troops on the Kursk salient had a very significant superiority. Taking into account the forces of the Steppe Front, it reached more than two times in manpower, 1.8 times in tanks, 2.8 times in guns and mortars. It seemed that the enemy would not be able to advance a single step and would be destroyed already on the way. However, the battle on the Kursk salient turned out to be extremely difficult for both sides, and its outcome was far from immediately determined.

One of the greatest battles of the Great Patriotic War began in the early morning of July 5, 1943. The German troops, as expected by the Soviet command, struck at the formations of the Central and Voronezh fronts with the clear intention of "cutting" the base of the Kursk ledge.

But this time the German offensive was forewarned

4 'See: Weapons of Victory / Ed. V.N. Novikov. - M., 1987. P. 421 -

. See: History of the Second World War, 1939-1945. T.7. M.: Voeniz Lat, 1976. S. 138.

381

Tillerian counter-training. Two hours before it starts. The tilleria of both fronts dealt a preemptive blow to the advance. the enemy troops, who were going to their original positions, as a result. Then the enemy had to postpone the prepared strike for 2.5-3 hours.

Only at half past six in the morning did the German troops strike at the defense of the Central Front, marking the main direction of the offensive - through the village. Olkhovatka on Kursk. On the 45-km sector of the front, the offensive was carried out by nine divisions against the nickname, incl. two tanks. The "armored fist" of Army Group Center—more than 500 tanks supported by 300 bombers—was supposed to break through the multi-layered Soviet defenses. As before, the enemy demonstrated the highest level of interaction on the battlefield. Heavy artillery from closed positions suppressed the firepower of the Soviet defense, groups of bombers of 50-60 bombers attacked command posts, reserves, and troop positions. At this time, large groups of tanks and infantry in armored personnel carriers attacked the front line of the Soviet defense. A novelty was the use of heavy tanks "Tiger", "Panthera" and heavy self-propelled guns "Ferdinand" in the offensive. Using the range of their guns and the excellent qualities of their optics, they fired from afar, remaining out of the reach of anti-tank defenses, successfully suppressing the surviving firing points. This tactic allowed the German divisions on the second attempt to break into the first line of defense of the 13th Army of General N.P. Pukhov to a depth of 8-15 km and encircle units of the 81st and 15th divisions. But now, in contrast to the encirclement of 1941-1942, the Soviet troops continued to stubbornly defend themselves - the experience gained by the commanders, the confidence in the ambulance allowed them to successfully repel enemy attacks. The attack of the armored armada was met by Soviet artillery fire, tank counterattacks, and air strikes. Especially successful were the attacks of the IL-2 attack aircraft using new cumulative bombs. Thus, six aircraft of the 58th Guards Assault Regiment destroyed 18 enemy tanks in 20 minutes of combat. To the rescue of the surrounded front commander

382

sent army and front reserves. The battle would very soon reach its highest intensity. On July 6, the command of the Central Front launched a counterattack against the advancing enemy with the forces of one rifle and two tank corps. But too little time was allotted for its organization, and the blow did not achieve its goal - the attacks of Soviet tanks did not stumble on the deadly fire of heavy German tanks. It was only possible to release the encircled units and stop the enemy offensive!

As usual, the German command began to look for weakly covered areas of defense and changed the direction of the main attack, turning it to the village. Ponyri. But even here the German tanks got bogged down in a well-organized and skillfully controlled defense. The front commander, General K.K. Rokossovsky, taking a conscious risk, removed reserves from the non-attacked sectors of the front and threw them into battle. July 6-9 Ponyri became a key point in the struggle of the opposing forces on the second line of defense of the Central Front. On July 12, the enemy was able to advance only 10-12 km, having used up the offensive capabilities of the troops. The heaviest

losses in tanks, the broken skeletons of which literally littered the battlefield, made the further offensive of the Wehrmacht on the northern face of the Kursk ledge unpromising - even in the event of a successful breakthrough of the Soviet defense, there was nothing left to throw at Kursk.

By that time, the main hopes of the enemy were connected with the actions on the southern flank of the Kursk Bulge against the troops of the Voronezh Front. The powerful forces of the Wehrmacht were concentrated here, incl. and its elite units - four SS divisions, well equipped and trained. But the first day of the offensive did not lead to success. Only in the minefields of the defensive zone of the 6th and 7th Guards Armies of the Voronezh Front, the enemy lost 67 tanks, 12 tanks were destroyed by sapper detachments using demolition dogs. It was tanks that became the main goal of all Soviet defense forces, including

aviation and artillery of all kinds. After each new attack

1

See: Rokossovsky K.K. Decree. op. S. 270.

383

more and more smoky fires of wrecked German tanks appeared in front of the positions of the Soviet defense. On the second day of the offensive, the command of the Army Group "South" concentrated its strike forces on a narrow sector and managed to break through two lines of defense in the direction of the village. Oboyan. The commander of the Voronezh Front, General N.F. Vatutin tried to stop the enemy with tank counterattacks. Three tank corps and formations of the 1st Tank Army were involved in the counterstrike. But in preparing the counterattack, a number of miscalculations were made, quite in the spirit of the summer battles of 1941. km) and arrived at the appointed place only two hours before the start of the offensive. There was no time left for the preparation of the strike - reconnaissance of the area, ensuring interaction with neighbors and clarifying tasks. As a result, the actions of the corps were inconclusive. The 10th Panzer Corps, having made a 100-kilometer march, arrived in the designated area only by the end of the FDI on July 8 and did not take part in the counterattack. The 5th Guards Tank Corps turned out to be the only one that managed to go over to the offensive at the scheduled time. But he did not receive the support of other corps and, having fallen under the concentrated attacks of enemy aircraft and tanks, he suffered heavy losses - 77 tanks out of 85!. The brunt of the struggle that day was borne by the formations of the 1st Panzer Army, but its counterattack did not achieve its goal either.

From the memoirs of the commander of the 1st tank army M.E. Katukova:

"By this time, there was a general opinion in the 1st tank,



that in the current situation it is simply inexpedient to inflict a counterattack on tank brigades and corps... After all, their tank forces not only outnumber ours, but also have a significant advantage in armament! Enemy

1 See: Khodarenok M. Pervaya Prokhorovka. On the southern flank of the Kursk Bulge, large-scale tank battles were played out every day // NVO, 05/16/2003.

384

"tigers" can fire from their 88-mm guns at our vehicles at a distance of up to 2 kilometers, being in the zone of inaccessibility of the fire of 76.2-mm guns of our thirty-fours. In a word, the Nazis are able to carry on a successful firefight with us from distant frontiers. Wouldn't it be better under these conditions to put off a counterattack and continue to rely on our carefully prepared defense in depth? Meanwhile, we will grind enemy equipment and manpower. And when we bleed their parts, smash the fascist armored fist, then the right moment will ripen for delivering a mighty counterattack. But so far, that moment has not come.

We reported these considerations to the front commander. They waited for an answer, but did not receive it by the end of the night. In the meantime, the deadline for fulfilling the point of the order on a counterattack had come, and we had no choice but to advance the tanks.

Reluctantly, I gave the order for a counterattack. And the steppe, which a minute ago seemed deserted, deserted, was filled with the rumble of hundreds of engines. Thirty-fours crawled out from behind the shelters and, on the move, reorganizing themselves into battle formation, rushed at the enemy. Infantry lines moved behind the tanks... Already the first reports from the battlefield near Yakovlevo showed that we were doing something completely different from what was needed. As expected, the brigades suffered serious losses. With pain in my heart, I saw with the NP how thirty-fours were burning and hooting ... "I.

The counter attacks of the Soviet tank corps did not stop the advance of the enemy, but turned out to be heavy losses for them. "Tigers" and "Panthers" from shelters and from a long distance shot thirty-fours, remaining practically invulnerable to the fire of Soviet tanks. The actions of the German aviation turned out to be very effective. Here the enemy used a new powerful anti-tank weapon - nickel-plating Yu-87 bombers armed with 37-mm cannons that pierced the horizontal armor of Soviet tanks. Only for the first day of fighting, the famous German ace

G. an-Ulrich Rudel destroyed 12 Soviet tanks?. General — \_ — \_d

' Katukov M. E. Decree. op. pp. 218-220.

2 See: Rudel G. Pilot "Things". - Minsk, 2003. S. 93.

13 A. Kilichenkov 385

the losses of the tank formations of the Voronezh Front during the counterattacks on that day amounted to 343 tanks.

The selfless attacks of the Soviet tankmen bled the shock formations of the front, but at the suggestion of General M.E. Katukov go on the defensive front commander General N.F. Vatutin did not answer. There was a real threat of a repetition of the events of the summer of 1941, when in large-scale but fruitless attacks the Southwestern Front lost all its mechanized corps and lost its offensive capabilities. The situation changed only after the commander of the 1st Panzer Army turned directly to I. Stalin, who canceled the order to counterattack ?. This episode very clearly manifested the essence of the relations that had changed during the two years of the war among the high command of the Red Army. By the summer of 1943, Stalin had already

, began to consider generals as "cogs" of the machine management, designed only to carry out his will. The Supreme Commander already recognized the right of military leaders, up to the level of an army commander, to have their own opinion and, moreover, was often inclined to share it. Awareness of this changed attitude strengthened the conceit of the military leaders, increased their self-esteem, and hence their ability to make and implement their own decisions, and to bear responsibility for them.

The command of the Army Group "South", in search of a weak sector of defense, deployed its tank spearhead in the direction of the village. Prokhorovka. There was a real threat of a breakthrough in the defense of the Voronezh Front. And again, the Soviet Headquarters threw its main trump card on the scales - the most powerful reserves. On the way of the Germans to Kursk, three armies were deployed at once, and General N.F. Vatutin received an additional two guards armies - the 5th combined arms army, Lieutenant General A.S. Zhadov and the 5th tank lieutenant general P.A. Rotmistrov.

Having received such powerful reinforcements, the command of the Voronezh Front planned a new attack on Yakovlevo with the aim of encircling and destroying the 4th German Panzer Army,

" See: Khodarenok M. Decree. op. 2 See: Katukov M.E. Decree. op. S. 220.

386

3rd Panzer Corps and formations of the Raus Corps. For this, the forces of five armies were involved, incl. - two tanks. And again the commander was clearly in a hurry to go on the offensive. There was clearly not enough time to implement such a large-scale plan, and the prospects for such an offensive, when the enemy still retained powerful tank reserves, were very

doubtful. On July 11, the German command continued the offensive, and on the very first day, the formations of the four armies of the Voronezh Front were forced to leave their advanced positions. The question of the encirclement of the 4th German Panzer Army disappeared by itself, now the main thing was to stop the enemy, who was rapidly advancing to the Prokhorovka area. The 5th Guards Tank Army was advanced towards the 2nd SS Panzer Corps with the task of defeating the enemy. And again, General N.F. Vatutin preferred frontal strike tactics, although it was already very clear that frontal attacks were extremely beneficial only to the enemy, who had a three to five-fold advantage in firing range. Rotmistrov's tank army, having made a forced 300-kilometer march, together with two tank corps attached to it, was sent to attack the 2nd SS tank corps!. But instead of a flank attack, it turned out to be a counter attack. On the morning of July 12, a grandiose tank battle unfolded near Prokhorovka, which is considered the largest oncoming tank battle of the Second World War, in which several hundred tanks and self-propelled guns participated on both sides?. In a narrow 5-kilometer space, two armored armadas moved towards each other, the battle very quickly reached the highest bitterness on both sides. Soviet and German tanks "jumped into each other, grappled, could no longer disperse, fought to the death until one of them flared up with a torch ... But the wrecked tanks, if their weapons did not fail, continued to lead

1 See: Rotmistrov P.A. Time and tanks. - M.: Voenizlat, 1972. S. 153.

? The number of tanks and self-propelled guns that participated in the battle is usually determined to be about 1200 (See: History of the Second World War, 1939-1945, vol. 7, p. 154). But modern researchers estimate the number of combat vehicles on both sides at about 680 combat vehicles. (See: Lopukhovskiy Lev. Prokhorov without a classification stamp//NVO dated 10/31/2003.)

387

fire"! Rotmistrov's army had more than double

`ascension over` the enemy among the combat vehicles, but could not solve the assigned tasks, while suffering heavy losses - over 500 tanks and self-propelled guns<sup>2</sup>. Finally realizing that frontal attacks would not lead to success, the front command ordered the tank formations to go on the defensive on July 15-16.

The result of these fierce counterattacks was the suspension of the German offensive on the sector of the Voronezh Front. Usually the battle of Prokhorovka is considered the climax of the Battle of Kursk and is regarded as an undoubted victory for the Red Army. Indeed, the enemy offensive in this sector was suspended, but at the same time the German 3rd Panzer Corps managed to advance another 10-15 km in the defense zone of the 69th Army, formations of the 5th Guards had to retreat 1-2 km. army of General A.S. Zhadov. In other words, the enemy continued to "bite" into the Soviet

defense, which meant that, having sacrificed his shock tank formations, N.F. Vatutin only managed to slow down the offensive of the Army Group "South" on the southern sector of the Kursk salient, but no more.

From the point of view of military leadership, this was an obvious miscalculation. The front command squandered its own reserves and those transferred by the Headquarters in a far from good way. It is surprising that General N.F. During the winter offensive on the Don, Vatutin showed the undoubted qualities of a commander, boldly maneuvering his forces, inflicting unexpected blows on a wide front, achieving brilliant results. Near Kursk, the same Vatutin acted in the "best traditions" of 1941-1942, preferring repeated frontal strikes and, apparently, not thinking about any maneuver. Failed to destroy the enemy with tank counterattacks and Commander Tsen

1 Rotmistrov P.A. Steel Guard. - M., 1984. S. 186.

? See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. P.269. The losses suffered by the army of P.A. Rotmistrov in the battle on July 12, made a shocking impression on I. Stalin. In order to identify the reasons for such high losses in tanks, a special commission headed by G. Malenkov was created by his order. (See: Lev Lopukhovsky, op. cit.)

388

trawl front, General K.K. Rokossovsky. The main reason for the return to the previous tactics of frontal strikes was the close attention of the Stavka and its strict control through its representatives over the activities of the front commanders. Stalin seriously feared the possibility of a breakthrough of German tanks and the encirclement of Soviet troops in the Kursk salient. Apparently, the "syndrome of 1941" was still making itself felt. This made it necessary to keep the situation at the front under strict control - hence Stalin's constant calls to the front, and not only to the commanders of the fronts, but also to the commanders of the armies. Representatives of the Stavka constantly controlled the actions of the commanders, which, of course, did not add to their freedom of action. Nervousness was added by constant calls from the General Staff.

From the memoirs of Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky:

Summing up some results of the defensive battle on the Kursk Bulge of the troops of the Central Front, I would like to note the characteristic moments that I mentioned earlier, because I consider them fundamental and they have always bothered me. The first of these is the role of representatives of the Headquarters. We had G.K. Zhukov. He came to us on the eve of the battle, got acquainted with the situation... If a representative of the Headquarters was here or not, nothing has changed from this, and perhaps even worsened. For example, I am sure that if he were in Moscow, then the 27th Army of General S.T. Trofimenko would not be handed over to the Voronezh Front

that greatly complicates our situation. —

By this time, I had a firm conviction that it would be more useful for him, as Deputy Supreme Commander, to be in the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command.

The second important point is the relationship of the General Staff with the headquarters of the fronts ... In the most tense situation, Mali-

—\_

So, on the second day of the German offensive, I. Stalin called the commander of the 1st Panzer Army, General M.E. Katukov and asked to report the situation, although he had a very clear idea of the situation from the front commander, General N.F. Vatutin. (See: M.E. Katukov, op. cit., p. 220.)

389

nin (chief of staff of the front) was called three times from the General Staff to the wire to report that the enemy had occupied an insignificant height in the sector of one of the regiments of the 70th Army. I would be embarrassed on this issue to call the chief of staff of the division, not to mention the army, to the wire.

Not infrequently from Moscow, bypassing the headquarters of the front, information was requested from the headquarters of the armies, which entailed an overload of the latter, since they had to report to the direct command as well. Having learned about such facts, I was forced to intervene and demand in a decisive form to stop the harmful practice ... I must say that the Stavka was also mistaken in this.

The course of the battle near Kursk clearly showed that Stalin's desire to tightly control the actions of the front commanders, and sometimes even attempts to direct the actions of the troops over their heads, had not yet been outlived by the summer of 1943. In his memoirs, Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky cites the text of his report to I. Stalin: "During the night I am taking all measures to withdraw ... the entire 5th mechanized corps, the 32nd motorized brigade and four IPTAP regiments ..."2. Leaving aside the question of the expediency of carrying out tasks of this level by the representative of the Stavka and the chief of the General Staff of the Red Army, I would like to note that an officer of the front headquarters could well lead the mechanized corps to the appointed place. In practice, representatives of the Headquarters not only fettered the initiative of the front command, but often simply replaced it.

Fierce fighting on July 5-12 on both sides of the Kursk salient resulted in heavy losses for the German shock groups as well. The prospect of a further offensive became more and more doubtful. On July 10, 1942, after receiving news of the start of the Allied landing in Sicily, the situation for the German command became extremely complicated. On July 13, at a meeting with the command of the Wehrmacht, Hitler announced his decision to stop Operation Citadel due to the fact that there was a real threat of losing Sicily and the subsequent landing

1 Rokossovsky K.K. Decree. op. pp. 278-279. ? Vasilevsky A.M. Decree.  
op. S. 28.

390

ki allies in southern Italy or in the Balkans'. On July 17, unexpectedly for the enemy, the offensive of the troops of the Southwestern and Southern fronts began. Already on the first day of the offensive, the advanced formations of the Southern Front seized a bridgehead on the western bank of the Mius River, which threatened the stability of the defense of this entire sector of the German front. This success of the Soviet strike forced the German command to urgently withdraw the entire 2nd SS Panzer Corps from the battle near Oboyan and transfer it to the reserve to repel the offensive. On the night of July 19, a general withdrawal of German troops from the recesses of the Kursk ledge began. The success of the actions of the Southern Front showed how effective the counterattacks of the Soviet troops could be if they were delivered not on the forehead, but on the flanks of the German strike groups.

Operation "Citadel" ended with a seemingly no result - the enemy was unable to break through the defenses of the Red Army, and the attempts of the Soviet command to defeat his offensive groupings with counter strikes were unsuccessful. But in reality, the significance of the failure of the Citadel went far beyond the operational results of the battle of Kursk. |

From the memoirs of Colonel General G. Guderian:

"As a result of the failure of the Citadel Offensive, we suffered a decisive defeat. Armored troops, replenished with such great difficulty, were put out of action for a long time due to heavy losses in people and equipment. Their timely restoration for conducting defensive operations on the Eastern Front, as well as for organizing defense on the west of Pade in the event of a landing that the Allies threatened to land next spring, was called into question. Needless to say, the Russians were quick to exploit their success. And there were no more quiet days on the Eastern Front. Ini Ciativa completely passed to the enemy.

' See: Manstein E. Decree. op. S. 533.

- Guderian Heinz. Memoirs of a soldier / Per. with him. - Rostov n / D .: Publishing house VO "Phoenix", 1998. S. 333.

391

"Father" of the German "Panzerwaffe" - Wehrmacht tank troops -

that - very accurately determined the fatal consequences of the failed tank assault on the Kursk ledge - the Wehrmacht lost its "smashing sword". Historians often refer to the Battle of Kursk as the "swan song" of the German tank forces. Never again have they been able to repeat their impressive breakthroughs and encirclements at the beginning of the war. From now on, retreat and exhausting defensive battles became their lot, when tank divisions and battalions were used according to the principle of "trishkin's coat" to patch holes in the collapsing German defenses. Guderian was also right in assessing the offensive actions of the Red Army troops after the failure of the Citadel. Having defended the Kursk ledge, the Soviet troops got the opportunity to use its overhanging position over the Oryol and Belgorod enemy groupings. It was the turn of the second part of the plan of the Soviet Headquarters. The operation to destroy the Oryol group was called "Kutuzov". It provided for the joint actions of three fronts - the Western, Bryansk and Central - the encirclement and complete destruction of the main forces of the 2nd tank and 9th field armies of the Wehrmacht, which was supposed to ensure the elimination of the Oryol bridgehead, according to the enemy, - "a dagger, aimed at the heart of Russia.

Success in repelling the German offensive on the Kursk Bulge inspired confidence in an early victory. The powerful reserves carefully prepared by the Headquarters for this moment also had to have their say. To defeat the Oryol grouping of the enemy, which numbered 0.6 million soldiers and officers, 1,100 aircraft, 1,200 tanks, 7,000 guns, three Soviet fronts were involved, which had 1.3 million people, 2,400 tanks, more than 3 thousand people. aircraft, 21 thousand guns!. Having mastered the experience of offensive operations by that time, the commanders of the fronts and armies, like the German generals in 1941, applied the principle of complete concentration of forces and means in the breakthrough areas. 60-80% of all troops were concentrated in narrow areas, which ensured a six to eight-fold superiority over the enemy.

1 See History of the Second World War, 1939-1945, Vol.7. pp. 158-159.

392

On July 12, in the midst of the fighting near Prokhorovka, the troops of the Western (commander - Colonel General V.D. Sokolovsky) and Bryansk (commander - Colonel General M.M. Popov) went on the offensive. Soon, six armies on two fronts along the entire perimeter of the Oryol ledge began to break through the enemy defenses. But it soon became clear that the original plan to encircle the two German armies had failed. It was not possible to break through the enemy defenses and go to his rear. The headquarters had to transfer its reserves to the advancing fronts - the 11th combined arms, 3rd and 4th tank armies. But even after this, a turning point in the development of the situation could not be achieved. The German troops were commanded by the most experienced commander - Colonel-General V. Model, a well-known defense master in the Wehrmacht, who successfully defended Rzhev-Vyazemsky

ledge for nearly a year and a half. The enemy effectively repelled the blows, covering up the mass export of grain and critical materials from the occupied territory. On July 26, Hitler ordered the planned withdrawal of troops from the Oryol salient to the rear defensive line "Hagen", created east of Bryansk. In early August, the retreating German troops tried to delay the formations of the Red Army on the outskirts of Orel, but on August 5, after three days of fierce fighting, the city was liberated. Retreating, the enemy reduced the length of the front line, which allowed him to transfer 13 divisions to the Smolensk direction, where a powerful Soviet offensive began at that time. But even after that, the German defense front held out. On August 17, the troops of the Bryansk Front were stopped on the Hagen line, the offensive on the Oryol direction was completed. It was not possible to destroy the Oryol grouping of the enemy, it was only pushed out of the ledge.

From the memoirs of Marshal G.K. Zhukov:

"Later, when analyzing the reasons for the slow development of events, we came to the conclusion that the main mistake lay in the fact that the Headquarters was somewhat hasty with the transition to counteroffensive operations and did not create a stronger grouping as part of the left wing of the Western Front, which, moreover, The course of the battle had to be seriously reinforced. Troops Bryan

393

of the front, had to overcome the defense in depth with a frontal attack ... .

The central front began its offensive where its counterattack ended, and moved on a broad front in front of the main enemy grouping...

Haste interfered. At that time, we all believed that it was necessary to beat the enemy as soon as possible, while he was still not firmly on the defensive. But this was an erroneous reasoning. All this, taken together, was the result of an underestimation of the enemy's defensive capabilities.

In the days that followed, the counter-offensive in the Oryol direction continued to develop at a slow pace.

JV Stalin was nervous, but he, of course, understood that he was primarily to blame, and not anyone else ... '.

From the memoirs of Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky:

"... the whole idea [of Operation Kutuzov] was to break up the Oryol group into parts, but also dispersed our troops. It seems to me that it would be easier and more accurate to deliver two main strong blows to Bryansk (one from the north, the second from the south). At the same time, it was necessary to provide an opportunity for the troops of the Western and Central Fronts to



regroup accordingly. But the Headquarters allowed unnecessary haste, which was not caused by the situation that had developed in this sector. That is why the troops on the decisive axes (Western and Central Fronts) failed to prepare in such a short time for the successful fulfillment of the assigned tasks, and the operation took on a protracted character. The enemy was pushed out of the Orlovsky ledge, and not his defeat. It became annoying that haste and caution were shown on the part of the Headquarters. Everything spoke against them. It was necessary to act more thoughtfully and more resolutely, that is, I repeat, to deliver two blows under the base of the Oryol ledge. For this, it was only necessary to start the operation a little later.

It seems to me that the Headquarters did not take into account the circumstances

1 Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. pp. 71-72.

394

in that the enemy troops were on the Oryol bridgehead for more than a year, which allowed them to create a strong, defense in depth.

According to a similar scenario, the operation "Commander Rumyantsev" developed. The troops of the Red Army operating against the Belgorod-Kharkov grouping of the enemy had overwhelming superiority. There were 980,000 soldiers and officers, 2,400 tanks, about 1,300 aircraft, and 12,000 guns and mortars in the three fronts—Voronezh, Steppe, and Southwestern. E. Manstein's troops could only oppose them with about 300 thousand people, 600 tanks, more than 1,000 aircraft and 3,000 guns and mortars? Rumyantsev's plan called for cutting the enemy's forces by striking the adjacent flanks of the Voronezh and Steppe fronts and cutting off his retreat to the west and southwest. Commander of the Voronezh Front, General N.F. Vatutin also concentrated the most powerful grouping Ku in the breakthrough sector - up to 230 guns and 178 tanks per one kilometer of front. As on the Bryansk Front, a high density of strike forces was ensured in the area of the breakthrough of the Steppe Front under the command of General I.S. Konev - 300 guns and 43 tanks per one kilometer of the front. This made it possible to quickly break through the enemy defenses after the start of the offensive on August 3. On August 5, Belgorod was liberated. On August 10, the battle for Kharkov began. |

During the battle for Kharkov, a confrontation between two military leaders took place again - General of the Army N.F. Vatutin and Field Marshal E. von Manstein. Soviet troops again, like six months ago, rushed to Kharkov. And the flanks turned out to be open and poorly secured again. The German field marshal did not fail to take advantage of this. On August 11, Manstein, secretly concentrating three SS divisions on the flank of the Soviet troops, delivered his "second Kharkov" counterattack against Vatutin's troops. Formations of the 1st Tank and 6th Guards Armies of the Voronezh Front were driven back from Kharkov by

18-20 km. Then, again maneuvering forces, Manstein on-

\_\_\_\_\_

' Rokossovsky K.K. Decree. op. pp. 280-281.

\* See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 279.

395

carried a powerful blow to the 27th army of the same front. The offensive of the Red Army in this direction stalled. The repetition of the same mistakes provoked an angry reaction from Stalin.

From the directive of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief to the commander of the Voronezh Front, General N.F. Vatutin:

"The events of recent days have shown that you have not taken into account the experience of the past and continue to repeat old mistakes, both in planning and in conducting operations. The desire to attack everywhere and to capture the most painful territory without consolidating success and firmly securing the flanks of shock groups is an offensive of an indiscriminate nature. Such an offensive leads to dissipation of forces and means and enables the enemy to strike at the flank and rear of our groupings that have advanced far and are not provided with flanks and beat them piecemeal. Once again I am compelled to point out to you the unacceptable mistakes that you repeatedly repeat in carrying out operations...".

This time Vatutin managed to repel Manstein's blows - and this time powerful reserves came to the rescue. The entry into battle of the 4th Guards Army decided the outcome of the battle. The enemy went on the defensive again. Heavy, lengthy battles for the city ensued. The enemy fought skillfully and fiercely. Outnumbered, he used his advantage in organization, maneuver, and the interaction of heterogeneous forces. But in the end, the overwhelming superiority of the Red Army again turned out to be decisive, and on August 23 Kharkov was liberated. Operation Rummyantsev was completed. Together with it, the Battle of Kursk ended.

The Battle of Kursk lasted 50 days and became one of the most epic battles of World War II. More than 4 million people, more than 13,000 tanks and self-propelled guns, almost 12,000 aircraft, more than 69,000 guns and M&I guns took part in it from both sides. The Red Army won an impressive victory near Kursk. This was acknowledged by the enemy. 30 German divisions of the Wehrmacht were defeated, of which seven were armored, the Wehrmacht

\* Cit. by: Shtemenko S. M. Decree. op. pp. 183-184.

396

suffered heavy losses in men and equipment. In terms of their scale and severity, they were such that the German command could not replenish them until the very end of the war. According to German data, the total casualties of the Wehrmacht amounted to 474,702 soldiers and officers killed, wounded, captured. According to Soviet data, the German army irrevocably lost 1,500 tanks, 3,700 aircraft and more than 3,000 guns near Kursk.

During the Battle of Kursk, a turning point in the war ended. And this fact was also recognized by both the enemy and the allies of the USSR. Particularly impressive was the fact that the Wehrmacht, as in its best period, chose the time and place of the offensive in the summer campaign, traditionally the most favorable for it. The German command planned the offensive in full accordance with its favorite tactic - a powerful strike by concentrated groupings on the flanks with the aim of deep encirclement of the enemy's main forces. The troops had enough time to prepare the offensive. The best, elite forces of the German army were sent to Kursk, equipped with the latest weapons, led by the most experienced commanders, such as Manstein and Model. But even under these conditions, the Wehrmacht could not succeed. It became extremely obvious that the German army was no longer able to conduct large-scale and successful offensive operations on the Eastern Front, but defensive operations in the conditions of the outbreak of war on two fronts doomed Germany to inevitable defeat, due to lack of resources. From now on, the military collapse of the Third Reich became only a matter of time.

The actions of the Red Army during the Battle of Kursk were highly appreciated by the Soviet command.

From the memoirs of Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky:

"... we not only won the great battle, but also grew up in it. Our ideas in developing the plan for the summer campaign came true, we learned to better guess the intentions of the enemy.

We had enough will, character, just endurance and nerves, that-

—

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 284.

397

not to make a miscalculation, not to start hostilities prematurely, not to give the enemy an extra chance. The development of operational strategic tasks was carried out successfully. It has also increased. command and control skills at all levels. In a word, our art of military leadership demonstrated both the creative nature and superiority over the military skill of the fascist command.

From the memoirs of Marshal G.K. Zhukov:

"The Soviet strategic and operational-tactical command has grown significantly and strengthened in the art of warfare. The counteroffensive on the Kursk salient, in contrast to the counteroffensives near Moscow and Stalingrad, was a pre-planned, well-supported deep strike.

Significantly larger forces were involved here than in previous major counteroffensive operations. For example, 17 small general military armies without tank formations took part near Moscow, 14 combined arms armies took part in the Stalingrad area, 1 tank army and several mechanized corps. 22 powerful combined-arms, 5 tank, 6 air armies and large long-range aviation forces took part in the counteroffensive near Kursk.

In the battle of Kursk, in the course of a counteroffensive, tank and mechanized formations and formations were widely used for the first time, which in a number of cases were the decisive factor in operational maneuver, a means of rapidly developing success in depth and reaching the rear routes of enemy groupings.

Tank armies, artillery divisions and corps, powerful air armies of the fronts have significantly changed our capabilities, and consequently the nature of front operations, both in terms of scale and objectives. In comparison with the first period of the war, the Soviet troops became many times more mobile.

'This provided a significant increase in their maneuverability AND the average daily rate of advance'<sup>2</sup>.

1 Vasilevsky A.M. Decree. op. pp. 29-30. Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. pp. 73-74.

398

However, in this case it is hardly possible to unreservedly agree with the above assessments of the marshals. Despite the overwhelming superiority in forces, the use of powerful strike formations and formations (tank armies), despite the increased skill of military leaders, the price of victory this time turned out to be incredibly high. According to official data, the total losses of the Red Army during the Battle of Kursk (July-August 1943) amounted to 863,303 people, of which 254,470 were irretrievable losses. The losses of equipment were very heavy - 6,064 tanks and self-propelled guns, 1,626 aircraft, 5,244 guns and mortars! Attention is drawn to the fact of the unusually high daily losses of personnel in the operations "Kutu Call" and "Rumyantsev". In the first of them, the losses amounted to 11,313 people, in the second - 12,170. In terms of daily losses among strategic offensive operations, they are second only to Berlin - 15,325 people daily? The highest for the entire war among the offensive operations of the Red

The army turned out to be daily losses of tanks, in the Belgorod-Kharkov operation they amounted to 89 units.

This level of loss of people and equipment most convincingly testified that the Soviet command failed to suppress the organized defense of the enemy. As long as it remains so, the losses of the attacking side always exceed those of the defenders. And only after the defense has been breached, its control destroyed, when the advancing units go behind enemy lines and begin to smash his rear, when the retreating columns of troops and equipment fall under the blow of the tanks that have broken through, chaos and panic arise in the ranks of the enemy, this ratio changes to direct opposite. (The high level of losses of the Red Army in the summer battles of 1941 and 1942 was explained by the transition of the battle to this phase.) During the summer offensive of 1943, this was not achieved, the enemy organized an organized retreat to the prepared defense lines.

Moreover, Manstein's counterattacks near Kharkov showed

how dangerous this type of Wehrmacht action was and how

And

- Calculated according to: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S.285-287, 485. Ibid. pp. 286-287, 307.

But Manstein himself was right in suggesting to Hitler a similar tactic of action in the summer campaign of 1943.

The offensive of the Red Army near Kursk, instead of encircling and destroying the enemy, turned into a long, hard and bloody "pushing" him out of the Oryol and Belgorod ledges. Separate successful breakthroughs of the German defense could not be turned into a deep encirclement due to the lack of reserves scattered around the entire perimeter of the offensive. The own forces of the advancing armies and fronts were only enough to break through the defenses. In a certain sense, the mistakes of the offensive plan of 1942 were repeated, when, at Stalin's insistence, it was decided to attack on all fronts at once. The difference was only in scale, but the result was the same - striving to gain superiority everywhere, they did not achieve it in any of the sections. These shortcomings were basically the result of the offensive plan adopted at the Headquarters. During its discussion at Headquarters, G.K. Zhukov, A.M. Vasilevsky and A.I. Antonov suggested, using the advantageous position of the Kursk ledge, to make a deep encirclement of the Oryol group, but Stalin unexpectedly objected: "Our task is to expel the Germans from our territory as soon as possible, and we will surround them when they become weaker ..." This time, neither Zhukov, Neither Vasilevsky dared to object to the Supreme Commander-in-Chief! As a result, a plan was adopted to simultaneously break through the enemy defenses in several directions by means of "cutting blows", which was supposed to lead to the collapse of the entire enemy front. Using analogies, we can say that in this case Stalin preferred to repeat the "Moscow" version of the offensive along the entire front, while the generals proposed the "Stalingrad" version of a strike on the flanks with the aim of deep encirclement. But the "Moscow" version of the offensive

in this case was doomed to failure. In contrast to the winter of 1941/42. the enemy had enough time to organize with all the German diligence a powerful defense, the depth of which reached 90 km. To break through it at once in all directions, the troops were not

condition.

<sup>1</sup> See: Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. S. 72.

400

The preference given by Stalin to frontal tactics is usually explained by the protracted completion of the Stalingrad operation. G.K. Zhukov recalled on this occasion: "From the time of Stalingrad, Stalin adhered to his own approach to the problems of encircling and destroying German troops. The course of the Stalingrad operation sunk into his memory, and he repeatedly returned to its experience ... There is no need to surround him [the enemy] on our territory. Gotta kick him out. It is necessary to drive, to free the land as soon as possible, in the spring it will be necessary to sow, we will need bread. It is necessary to reduce the possibility of destruction, let him go. Create an environment for him to leave quickly. We need to get him out of our area as soon as possible. Here is our task. And you will carry out the encirclement later, on enemy territory.

The fierce resistance of the encircled army of F. Paulus for a long time fettered the numerous grouping of the Red Army, which forced them to abandon the promising offensive against Rostov in order to block the enemy in the North Caucasus. However, Stalin also had other reasons for refusing a new operation to encircle powerful enemy forces. During the offensives of 1942-1943. none of them, with the exception of Stalingrad, failed. Moreover, the success of Manstein's powerful counterattack in February-March 1943, when the enemy managed to retake Belgorod and Kharkov, served as a more serious reason for doubting the prospects of a new VOGO "rush to the Dnieper", as the General Staff originally proposed? Stalin approached this issue as a politician. The liberation of Soviet territory as a result of a frontal offensive produced an equally important but guaranteed political effect, in contrast to risky enveloping strikes, the failure of which was quite capable of leading to the loss of already achieved results. The downside of this "political" approach to planning operations was the inevitable heavy losses of the advancing troops. And this is in my eye

<sup>b</sup> Cited. Quoted from: Sukhodeev V., Solovyov B. Commander Stalin. - M.: Publishing House of Ex Mo, 2003. S. 161.

<sup>?</sup> See: Nnemenko S.M. Decree. op. S. 161.

401

This made it extremely difficult for the Red Army to move further to the west. As Marshal G.K. Zhukov, "we did not have the opportunity to carefully prepare the offensive to the Dnieper. In the troops of both fronts [Voronezh and Stepnoy. - A.K.] I felt very tired from the continuous battles. There were some interruptions in logistical support.

Battle for the Dnieper. The liberation of Orel and Belgorod opened the way to the west for the liberation of the entire left-bank Ukraine. The next target on this path of the Red Army was the Dnieper. The key importance of this milestone was recognized by both sides. The high western bank of this river, almost along its entire length, created excellent opportunities for creating a solid defense, and, consequently, for holding the German army in the western regions of Ukraine. Already in the spring of 1943, along the right bank of the Dnieper, the construction of the so-called "Eastern Wall" - a strategic frontier - began. defense, designed to become the new eastern border of the Reich. With the retention of this line, the German command linked all its future plans. The calculation was now made to bleed the Red Army. |

From the memoirs of Field Marshal E. Manstein:

"But our resources have dried up! ... Despite this, the command of the group [Army "South"] firmly believed that we would eventually be able to stop the onslaught of the eastern forces. Along with our unconditional faith in the superiority of the German soldier, we should also mention here the experience of the 1942/43 winter campaign that we took into account, which we were able to successfully complete despite the most difficult crises. In addition, according to OKH? one could assume that the human resources of the Soviet Union would gradually run out. The reserves in the older age categories, from which he drew strength for his new formations, seemed to have largely been used up.

1 Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. S. 80. ? High command of the ground forces of Germany.

402

dovany. If only conscripts remained as replenishment for the front, then the enemy could no longer create new formations on a large scale, although the Soviets had at least three times more young men of military age to be mobilized than ours. But we still hoped to cope with this superiority and exhaust the offensive force of the enemy ... "".

For the Soviet command, the exit of the Red Army to the Dnieper now became a key issue for the future. It was necessary to thwart the enemy's attempt to create

an insurmountable barrier on its shore.

The Battle of Kursk was still going on when the plan of the throw to the Dnieper was decided at the Soviet Headquarters. It was supposed to conduct an offensive on the broadest front - from the headwaters of the Dnieper to the Black Sea. For this, the forces of eight fronts were involved. And again disagreements arose between Stalin and his generals.

From the memoirs of Marshal G.K. Zhukov:

"From A.I. Antonov's report I understood that the Supreme Commander urgently demanded that the offensive be developed immediately in order to prevent the enemy from organizing defenses on the outskirts of the Dnieper. I shared this attitude, but did not agree with the form of our offensive operations, in which the fronts from Velikiye Luki to the Black Sea deployed frontal frontal attacks.

After all, it was possible (after some regroupings) to carry out operations to cut off and encircle significant enemy groupings, which would facilitate the further conduct of the war. In particular, I had in mind the southern enemy grouping in the Donbass, which could be cut off by a powerful blow from the Kharkov-Izium region in the general direction of Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhye.

A.I. Antonov said that he personally shared this opinion, but the Supreme Commander demanded that the enemy be thrown back from our territory with frontal strikes as soon as possible ...

A few days later, I.V. Stalin called me and ... Deputy ONI Manstein E. Decree. qp.

S. 546.

403

said that he did not share my point of view on the strike of the troops of the South-Western Front from the Izium region in Zaporozhye, since this would take a considerable amount of time.

I did not argue, because I knew that the Supreme Commander, for a number of reasons, was not yet very confident in the advisability of a more decisive use of operations to encircle the enemy.

Stalin again preferred the simple benefit of frontal strikes, citing the lack of time as the reason. Again, as before, stakes were placed on cutting and collapsing the entire front of the German defense. the same "Moscow version arr. 1942" offensive. But even here, as near Orel and Belgorod, the enemy managed to create a powerful defense. As a result, Stalin's decision, which proceeded from the lack of time to maneuver and prepare the encirclement, inevitably led to another pushing out of the enemy, new heavy losses and the inevitable prolongation of operations, and hence the loss of time.



The first on August 7 began the operation to liberate Smolensk, which received the code name "Suvorov". The operation was carried out by two fronts - Western (commander - General of the Army V.D. Sokolovsky) and Kalinin (commander - General of the Army A.I. Eremenko). The importance of the new offensive of the Red Army in this direction was that there was the "old Smolensk road" - the shortest route to the west, which directly led Soviet troops to Belarus, Poland and further - to Germany. The unexpected arrival of I.V. testified to the significance of this operation. Stalin. In early August, he visited the Western and Kalinin fronts and discussed the plan of operation with the commanders.

The enemy also understood this, who managed to create a powerful defense system in a year and a half, which was greatly facilitated by the terrain - wooded with hills, a large number of large and small rivers, and vast swampy areas. (However, the same terrain unfavorable for the offensive was

'  
Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. pp. 77-78. 2 See:  
History of the Second World War, 1939-1945 V.7. 1976. S. 241-

404

overcome by the Wehrmacht in just three weeks of the offensive in the fall of 1941)

Back in June 1943, the Soviet Headquarters assigned the command of the Western and Kalinin fronts to prepare an offensive in the Smolensk direction, so there was enough time for preparation. As before, the Stavka's plan provided for strikes along the entire front of the enemy's defense in order to pin down the enemy's forces and prevent his maneuver. The main blow was to be delivered to the Western Front, to break through the enemy's defenses in four places at once and destroy his troops in the area of Yelnya and Spas-Demensk, and then move on to Roslavl and Smolensk. The Kalinin Front was supposed to provide a breakthrough in only one sector, securing the left flank of the Western Front and advancing on Smolensk through Dukhovshchina.

The idea was not distinguished by any elegance or unusualness. Another powerful frontal strike was planned, in other words, another frontal attack on the prepared defenses of the enemy, who had been expecting a strike for a long time. The calculation was made on superiority in strength. For this purpose, the Stavka placed at the disposal of General V.D. Sokolovsky large reserves - two combined arms armies, one mechanized and one cavalry corps, three aviation corps. Both Soviet fronts had 1,253,000 men, 20,640 guns and mortars, 1,436 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 1,100 aircraft. Army Group Center could oppose them with about 850 thousand people, up to 8,800 guns and mortars, up to 500 tanks and self-propelled guns, and less than 700 aircraft. The great advantage of the Red Army in this area was the ability to use

to establish numerous and well-organized partisan detachments in the Smolensk and Kalinin forests.

The offensive of the three armies of the Western Front, which began on August 7, immediately ran into a skillfully organized defense. And only on the fourth day of the operation, after the entry into battle of one of the reserve armies, its main zone was overcome

Lena. General Sokolovsky immediately introduced the 5th mechanized into the breakthrough

See: History of the Second World War ... S. 239, 241.

405

zirovannaya corps with the aim of intercepting the Warsaw highway, but its advance was practically stopped by assault strikes by German aircraft. The front command failed to cover the corps with its own fighter aircraft. All that remained was to continue the frontal attacks. Only two days later, formations of the Western Front approached Spas-Demensk.

The offensive in the Smolensk direction dragged on, the troops suffered heavy losses. The situation changed radically only on August 12 after the successful strikes of the Central Front on the right flank of Army Group Center, after which the German units began a hasty retreat from Spas-Demensk, showing how sensitive the enemy was to the threat of flanking bypasses. On August 13, the planned offensive of the troops of the Kalinin Front began, but everything was repeated there. In five days of fighting, the front advanced only 6-7 km. By order of the Headquarters, the offensive in the Smolensk direction was suspended. Hacking the front of the German defense did not work.

The offensive resumed on August 28 after the fronts had received the necessary reinforcements. Having abandoned the idea of carrying out strikes along the entire front, efforts were concentrated in the direction of Yelnya. On the very first day, they managed to advance 8 km, and then General Sokolovsky began to sequentially introduce his reserves into the gap - the 5th Mechanized, 6th Guards Cavalry and, finally, the 2nd Tank Corps. This made it possible to break through to Yelna, an important communications route, and on August 30 to capture it. On September 1, Dorogobuzh was liberated. The successful offensive was effectively helped by the actions of the partisans, who inflicted constant blows on German communications. Taking another operational pause, on September 15, the troops of the Western and Kalinin fronts launched an offensive against the city of Russian military glory Smolensk. On September 23, it was possible to bypass it from the south and north, which forced the enemy to leave the city on September 25. On the same day, the city of Roslavl was liberated.

On October 2, the Smolensk operation was completed. It lasted 57 days, the Soviet troops managed to advance on. 200-250 km. However, to destroy, as planned, the front

406

the Western and Kalinin fronts could not. As at Orel and Belgorod, the Soviet troops had to break through powerful defensive lines on a wide front, without a significant superiority in forces. In fact, the Red Army again had to "gnaw through the defenses", it is not surprising that the average rate of advance was only 4-5 km per day. The inevitable consequence was heavy losses - 451,466 soldiers and officers, of which 107,645 were irretrievable. For the same reason, losses in tanks turned out to be exceptionally high - the enemy managed to destroy 863 tanks and self-propelled guns, which corresponded to the size of a fully equipped tank army! In addition, 234 guns were lost and mortars and 303 aircraft!.

After the liberation of Smolensk, the Red Army reached the headwaters of the Dnieper, but no further advance into the region of Orsha, Vitebsk and Mogilev, as required by the Headquarters, was possible. The prerequisites for a breakthrough to Belarus along the "old Smolensk road" could not be created.

The offensive was more successful in the south in the direction of the lower reaches of the Dnieper. On August 13, the troops of the South-Western (commander - General of the Army R.Ya. Malinovsky) and the Southern Fronts (commander - Colonel General F.I. Tolbukhin) launched an operation to liberate Donbass. The Soviet troops had a significant superiority over the enemy. Their composition included 1,053 thousand people, 1,257 tanks and self-propelled guns, about 1,400 aircraft and more than 21 thousand guns and mortars. Against the enemy forces facing them - the 1st Panzer and the newly recreated 6th Army had only 540 thousand soldiers and officers, 0 tanks, 1100 aircraft and about 5,400 guns and mortars ?.

On August 13, the troops of the Southwestern Front, having crossed the river. Seversky Donets, began to advance along its western coast, Providing the flank of the Steppe Front, which was mired in the battle for Kharkov. On August 18, units of the Southern Front went on the offensive. During its preparation, it was possible to secretly concentrate two combined-arms armies and striving

---

- See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 288, 485.

See: History of the Second World War, 1939-1945. T.7. pp. 194-195.

407

by a powerful attack under the cover of powerful artillery fire and air strikes, literally hack the so-called "Mius Front" of the enemy. Then General Tolbukhin threw a united cavalry-mechanized group into the gap, setting her the task, without getting involved in battles for fortified settlements, to reach the coast of the Sea of Azov. This plan itself ble-

more justified. The blow of tanks and cavalry cut through the unlucky 6th Army. After the liberation of Kharkov, formations of the Steppe and Voronezh fronts began a rapid advance to the southwest, covering the flank of the enemy grouping in the Donbass. On August 30, the troops of the Southern Front liberated Taganrog and went to the Sea of Azov. According to E. Manstein, there was a threat of a repetition of the Stalingrad catastrophe - the 6th Army was again in a semi-encirclement. But this time, Hitler heeded Manstein's calls. Army Group South received two armored and one motorized divisions, which enabled Manstein to carry out a series of his favorite counterattacks. But this new success of the German "master of counterattacks" changed little. Under pressure from superior forces, on September 15, the troops of Army Group South began a general withdrawal beyond the Dnieper.

By that time, the position of the German troops was extremely complicated by the breakthrough of the Soviet troops on the Dnieper, in its middle course. On August 26, the breakthrough to the Dnieper began the Central front. The strike group of the front - the 65th (commander - lieutenant general P.I. Batov) and the 2nd tank (commander - lieutenant general S.I. Bogdanov) army - struck in the direction of Sevs. Despite intensive reconnaissance and information received from the partisans, the direction chosen for the strike turned out to be heavily fortified by the enemy. Front Commander General K.K. Rokossovsky was forced to bring tank corps into battle and break through the defenses with their help; On August 27, Sevs was liberated, but it was not possible to advance further. The enemy managed to transfer reserves from other sectors of the front and block the advance of Soviet troops. Realizing the futility of continuing the offensive, Rokossovsky did not "break through" the enemy's defenses, as his colleagues on other fronts often did. General Rokossovsky

408

always distinguished by the desire for maneuver. And this time he preferred to change the direction of the main attack. The formations of the 60th Army of General I.D. Chernyakhovsky managed to find a weak sector in the enemy defenses in the Konotop direction and immediately break through the defenses to a great depth. Quickly realizing the prospects of a new direction, the front commander transferred all available reserves to the place of the breakthrough and redirected units of the 2nd Panzer Army that had already been put into battle on it. Now everything depended on whose maneuver with forces would be faster. This time, the actions of the Soviet commander turned out to be more skillful - the enemy was late with the maneuver. By September 5, the formations of the Central Front had already advanced 125 km. Having entered the operational space, sweeping away the enemy's barriers, smashing his rear, the 65th, 13th and 60th armies crossed the river on the move. Desna and liberated Konotop, and then - Nizhyn. The road to Kyiv was opened.

On September 21, units of the 13th Army crossed the Dnieper, ahead of the German units retreating to the river. Brilliant prospects opened up before the front.

But in the second half of September, quite unexpectedly

for Rokossovsky, the Headquarters changed the dividing lines of the fronts, moving them to the north. This meant that Kyiv now had to be liberated by the Voronezh Front of General N.F. Vatutin. The upset commander of the Central Front called Stalin, who explained this by the demand of the representative of the Headquarters in this direction, G.K. Zhukov and a member of the Military Council of the Voronezh Front N.S. Khrushchev. Rokossovsky's proposal to launch a flank attack with the forces of the far advanced 60th Army with the aim of cutting off the enemy from the Dnieper was also rejected. The destruction of these forces could significantly accelerate the stalled advance of the Voronezh Front to the Dnieper. And soon the 13th and 60th armies, which were successfully advancing on Kiev, were transferred to the Voronezh front of Tu, whose command, instead of actively using their success, preferred to transfer the 38th army to the 60th army's zone of operations in order to capture a bridgehead on the right bank of the Dnieper. At the same time, the 60th Army itself was ordered to

409

move northward, yielding their area to the newly arrived army'. This difficult to explain and extremely laborious maneuver took too much time. The 38th Army, leaving its sector of the front, had to go to the rear, make a transfer of forces, while it needed to cross the Desna and force the Dnieper. As a result, time was lost forever.

The offensive against Kyiv of the Voronezh Front met with strong resistance from the enemy. The successful advance of the formations of the Central Front helped out, weakening the German defense in the Kiev direction, from where the reserves were removed. General Vatutin set the task for his troops to reach the Dnieper with a throw and force it on the move. On September 21, the forward formations of the front reached the Dnieper in the area of the villages of Maly and Bolshoy Bukrin and began crossing on improvised means. On September 25, the Bukrinsky bridgehead was created, 10-12 km long and up to 6 km deep. But for the development of a further offensive, this bridgehead turned out to be extremely unsuitable. The opposite bank of the Dnieper in this place is high and steep, which gave the enemy an excellent opportunity to control all approaches to the river and prevent the concentration of troops on the left bank with aimed fire: In addition, German intelligence determined in time the advance of the formations of the Voronezh Front to the Dnieper in this direction, and the enemy managed to transfer powerful reserves.

In an attempt to expand the bridgehead, the front commander used airborne troops. But this attempt ended in disaster. According to the plan of the operation, three airborne brigades were to land in the areas adjacent to the bridgehead, which were to prevent the advance of enemy reserves. The experience of using a landing force near Vyazma in the winter of 1942 showed that the preparation and support of landing operations are the determining factor for success and the weakest link in its implementation. But this time, his own experience, bought with a lot of blood, was not taken into account. The preparation of the landing was carried out criminally badly. The landing was appointed

1 See: Rokossovsky K.K. Decree. op. C: 287; Interestingly, neither G.K. Zhukov nor N.S. Khrushchev comment on this fact in their recollections.

410

Chena on the night of September 25th. It is not surprising that the pilots of transport aviation, poorly trained for such purposes, lost their bearings, and the landing force - 4,570 people - turned out to be dispersed. sown over a large area. Some ended up on the left bank among their troops, some were thrown directly into the Dnieper. But most of the landing still ended up on the right bank of the Dnieper ... in the battle formations of the German troops. The reconnaissance of the front during the preparation of the landing was not able to open the advance of powerful enemy reserves to the parade ground. Part of the paratroopers managed to break into the forests to the partisans, part, united in groups, began operations behind enemy lines. But they could not provide any kind of organized assistance to the troops on the bridgehead! The failure of the landing operation, on which great hopes were placed, aroused Stalin's indignation. On this occasion, his special order was issued, which noted: "The release of a mass landing at night testifies to the illiteracy of the organizers of this case, because, as experience shows, the release of a mass night landing even on one's own territory is fraught with great difficulties." But this time there were no "organizational conclusions". Neither the commander of the front, General N.F. Vatutin, nor the representative of the Headquarters, Marshal G.K. Zhukov received no reprimands. The transfer of new forces to the Bukrinsky bridgehead and new attempts to advance from it to Kyiv did not produce results. But the proposal of the General Staff to seize a new bridgehead caused a sharp rejection of Stalin: "You haven't tried to attack properly yet, but you are already refusing. It is necessary to carry out a breakthrough from the existing bridgehead. It is not yet known whether the front will be able to create a new one? By that time, the troops of the 38th Army managed to seize a bridgehead on the right bank of the Dnieper north of Kyiv near the village. Lyutezh, the enemy's resistance there turned out to be significant

much weaker, and there was a real opportunity to strike at Kim

<sup>1</sup> See Shtemenko S.M. Decree. op. S. 187; The Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. M., 1998. S. 300; Beshanov V.V. Year 1942 - "training". - Minsk, 2002. S. 110-112.

\* Cit. by: Irtemenko S.M. Decree. op. S. 188. Ibid.

411

ev from the north. But Stalin continued to persist, and another month

The troops of the Voronezh Front carried out fruitless attacks from the Bukrinsky bridgehead, senselessly losing people and equipment. Only on October 25 did Stalin agree to redirect the troops of the front to the Lyutezhsky bridgehead. On November 3, the 3rd Guards Tank Army of General P.S. Rybalko, together with parts of the 38th Army, Major General K.S. Moskalenko dealt an unexpected and crushing blow to the German defenses. The covert redeployment of such a powerful formation as a tank army was a great achievement of the command of the Voronezh Front and gave brilliant results. The enemy was misled and until the last moment expected the main blow from the south. The appearance of an entire tank army on the Lyutezh bridgehead and its unexpected blow predetermined the outcome of the battle for Kyiv. On November 6, the city was liberated.

September 25-30, the troops of the Steppe Front, General I.S. The Koneva reached the Dnieper on a front more than 100 km wide and immediately captured a number of large bridgeheads. This put the enemy in an extremely difficult position due to the impossibility of accurately determining the direction of the further offensive. All attempts to destroy the bridgeheads were successfully repulsed - the crossing units managed to get powerful artillery and air cover. On September 26-28, according to a similar scheme, bridgeheads on the right bank of the Dnieper were captured by the troops of the Southern Front of General R.Ya. Malinovsky.

The offensive against Kiev of the troops of the Voronezh Front pinned down the reserves of the German command, and the enemy could not stop the successful actions of the troops of Konev and Malinovsky on the right bank of the Dnieper. As a result, the entire "Eastern shaft" began to fall apart. During the forcing of the Dnieper, Desna and other large rivers, the troops of the Red Army pretty much surprised the enemy with their ability to carry out crossings on the move, using only improvised means. Later, one of the German generals wrote: "Where the positions of Russians and Germans were separated by a river, forcing could be expected at any moment ... Often Russians suddenly

412

found in places where they were least expected. They acted with incredible speed, one night was enough for them to turn a small bridgehead into a powerful stronghold, from which it was very difficult to knock them out. | Developing success near Kiev, the troops of the | th Ukrainian Front? continued their advance to the west. On November 7, the front's tank formations liberated the city of Fastov, an important communication center, with an unexpected blow. The attack of the tankers was so swift that the enemy did not have time to take materials and part of the weapons out of the city. 22 military trains were captured with various property, thousands of tons of fuel, ore, and bread. The tankers also got an echelon with anti-aircraft guns, which were later very effectively used against German tanks. On November 13, Zhytomyr was liberated. The enemy who came to his senses began fierce counterattacks. But starting from

This time, and later - more and more often the enemy began to make mistakes in organizing counterattacks.

From the memoirs of General F. von Mellenthin:

"Unfortunately, the 25th Panzer Division was prematurely introduced into the battle near Fastov. The history of this division is very sad. It was formed in Norway and trained in France from August 1943. The division was completely unprepared for combat operations, but ... was transferred to Ukraine and put into battle ... Considering the critical situation west of Kiev, the command of the Army Group "South" decided immediately after unloading to send all the equipment on wheels to war zone. On the evening of November 6, di Visia received an order from the commander of the 4th Panzer Army to march to Fastov with maximum speed and hold

reap it "at any cost" by joint efforts with a tank regiment

Cit. In: The Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 323.

2. On October 20, by order of the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command, the fronts were renamed: Vorozhezhsky - 1st Ukrainian, Steppe - 2nd Ukrainian, South-Western - Ukrainian, Southern - 4th Ukrainian, Central - Belorussian.

413

SS division "Reich", and the tank regiment of the 25th DIVISION could arrive only a few days later.

Such orders and directives would require even a very experienced division and its headquarters to exert excessive force, and for unprepared units they were simply disastrous. On the afternoon of November 7, the advance detachment of the 146th motorized rifle regiment met Russian T-34 tanks south of Fastov and turned into a stampede. In terrible disorder, these unfired units fled...

Unfortunately, the 25th Panzer Division suffered such heavy losses in personnel and equipment that for several weeks it could not be used in any offensive operations. The experience of the 25th Panzer Division showed once again that in battles against the Russians, hardened units can gain an advantage by skillful maneuvering, while poorly trained troops have little chance of success.

The picture of the defeat of a tank division, hastily thrown to meet the enemy, recalls in detail the events of 1941, when the tank divisions of the Red Army entered the battle in exactly the same way and were subjected to annihilating thunder in the same way. Opponents clearly began to change places.

The defeat of the 25th Panzer Division did not stop the enemy.



And it was not only a desire to return the lost Kyiv. As General F. Mellenthin later noted, during the period of the described events - the chief of staff of the 48th tank

Corps, the main danger of the Soviet offensive was that "a wide and deep wedge driven by the Russians into the German defenses threatened to cut off Army Group South from Army Group Center, so it was necessary to take urgent countermeasures"?. Having gathered 15 divisions into a fist, incl. 7 tank and motorized, Manstein launched a powerful counterattack on Vatutin's troops - the third since the winter of 1943. The tanks of the 48th Corps attacked the forward formations of the 38th Army of the 1st Criminal Code of the Rain Front, quickly broke their resistance and began to advance, going into flank of the 1st Panzer Army. General

1 Mellenthin F. Decree. op. pp. 308-310.

? There. S. 308.

414

N.F. Vatutin once again underestimated the enemy. On November 20, the enemy again captured Zhitomir and intercepted the Zhitomir-Kyiv highway, advancing 40 km towards Kyiv. The situation again began to resemble Manstein's "Kharkov revenge".

Stalin closely followed the development of events near Kiev, he was soon to go to Tehran to meet with W. Churchill and F. Roosevelt, and the possible loss of Kiev could weaken the Soviet position in the upcoming negotiations. Stalin could not allow this, his patience ran out.

From the memoirs of marntal K.K. Rokossovsky:

"... Stalin called me to the apparatus. He said that things were not going well at Vatutin, that the enemy went on the offensive there and captured Zhitomir.

"The situation is becoming threatening," said the Supreme Commander. - If it goes on like this, then the Nazis can also hit the flank of the troops of the Belorussian Front.

Irritation and anxiety were felt in Stalin's voice. In conclusion, he ordered me to immediately leave for the headquarters of the 1st Ukrainian Front as a representative of the Headquarters, to sort out the situation on the spot and take all measures to repel the enemy's attack ... Just before leaving, I was handed telegrams from Mu with the order of the Supreme Commander: if necessary, immediately take command of the 1st Ukrainian Front, without waiting for additional instructions. I must confess that this order confused me. Why is the analysis of events on the 1st Ukrainian Front entrusted to me? But there was no time to think...

Vatutin had already been warned of our arrival. He met me with a group of front management officers. His view

I was preoccupied... No matter how hard I tried, a friendly conversation did not work out at first... the interlocutor spoke in some Truthful tone, turning the conversation into a report of a delinquent subordinate to a senior. In the end, I had to state bluntly that I had come here not for the purpose of investigating NIA, but as a neighbor who, in a comradely way, wanted to help him.

415

overcome by common efforts the difficulties that he is temporarily experiencing ...

Vatutin noticeably perked up, the tension gradually disappeared. We carefully examined the situation and did not find anything terrible.

Taking advantage of the passivity of the front, the enemy assembled a strong tank group and began to strike first in one place, then in another. Vatutin, instead of responding with a strong counterattack, continued to defend himself. This was his mistake. He explained to me that if it weren't for the proximity of the Ukrainian capital, he would have risked active actions long ago... I advised Vatutin to urgently organize a counterattack against the presumptuous enemy. Vatutin actively set to work. But nevertheless, he delicately asked when I would take command of the 1st Ukrainian Front. I replied that I didn't even think about it, I think that he copes with the role of commander of the front troops no worse than I do ... ".

Once again, the powerful reserves of the Stavka came to the rescue. Vatutin received at his disposal two combined arms and one tank armies. The further advance of Manstein's tanks to Kyiv was stopped. The battle continued until the end of November. Unable to break through to Kyiv, the German command, as usual, changed the direction of the blow and redirected the shock fist to the north, to the flank of the 60th Army of General I.D. Chernyakhovsky. This enemy maneuver, General N.F. Vatutin and his headquarters were neither able to foresee nor in time to open. On December 6, the tanks of the 48th German Corps attacked the formations of the 60th Army and, breaking through the defenses, surrounded the 141st Rifle Division and the artillery units of the army's USI. By the end of the day, the remnants of the division, having lost almost all of their weapons, nevertheless left the encirclement. A timely maneuver by the forces of the 60th and 1st Guards Armies made it possible to stop the enemy, who had penetrated 18-22 km into the Soviet defenses. The fighting in this direction continued until December 23. The German command was counting on at least a short-term P \*\* breath, but the very next day the troops of the 1st Ukrainian

!' Rokossovsky K.K. Decree. op. pp. 304-306.

416

front, using the reserves of the Headquarters, went on the counteroffensive

on January 1, 1944, the lost territory was returned. From the enemy wounded by intense counterattacks, having no more reserves, was forced to retreat. The astonished commander of Army Group A, E. Manstein, could only admit that "the hydra was growing new heads too quickly!" The battle for Kyiv is over.

While the battle for Kyiv was going on, the troops of the 1st Belorussian Front continued their successful offensive, pushing the enemy back 130 km and liberating Gomel on November 26, an important junction of highways and railways. The success of the troops of General K.K. Rokossovsky securely secured the northern flank of the 1st Ukrainian Front and created the prerequisites for the further offensive of both fronts in the 1944 campaign.

In November-December 1943, the offensive of the troops of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts also continued, which managed to liberate the right bank of the Dnieper from the enemy, up to 450 km long. But attempts to break through to Kirovograd and Krivoy Rog in order to reach the rear of the entire Army Group "A" in the Nikopol region failed. Towards the end of December 1943, the "battle for the Dnieper" ended sewed.

Breakthrough to the Crimea. After the Red Army reached the Dnieper, it became necessary to solve the "Crimean problem". By that time, the peninsula was defended by the 17th German army, numbering about 85 thousand people. About 30 high-speed landing barges, 37 torpedo boats, 25 hundred horn boats, and 6 minesweepers were based in the ports of Crimea. The holding of the Crimea by the enemy was a serious threat to the entire southern flank of the advancing Red Army. German aviation, operating from the Crimean airfields, could keep the rear and communications of the entire southern group of Soviet troops under attack. In general, the situation on this section of the Soviet-German front was a mirror image of the situation in the autumn of 1941, only now the Red Army had to solve the "Crimean problem".

' See: History of the Second World War, 1939-1945 vol. T.7.S. 233.

14 A. Kilichenkov 417

The question of the liberation of the Crimea at the Soviet Headquarters began to be discussed already in September 1943. The plan for the liberation of the Crimea provided for two strikes - from the north, through Perekop, by the troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front and from the east, through the Kerch Strait, by the forces of the North Caucasus front, which was to carry out the second landing in the Crimea. In December 1941, troops landed simultaneously in Kerch and Feodosia, which immediately put the enemy in danger of a deep encirclement and led to the rapid liberation of the entire Kerch Peninsula. But this time, the command of the North Caucasian Front preferred a frontal strike - right across the Kerch Strait, in its narrowest places, which almost immediately deprived the operation of any tactical surprise.

In general, the Soviet plan for a breakthrough into the Crimea was not distinguished by any originality and surprise for the enemy. The lack of originality of the idea was to compensate for the large number of forces involved. Formations of the 56th and 18th armies numbered 130 thousand soldiers and officers, 125 tanks and over 2 thousand guns and mortars. They were provided by 119 warships and 159 ships of the Black Sea Fleet and the Azov military flotilla, as well as over a thousand aircraft of the 4th Air Army and fleet aviation. The general management of the operation was entrusted to the front commander, General I.E. Petrov, he was subordinate to the Black Sea Fleet (commander - Vice Admiral L.A. Vladimirsky) and the Azov military flotilla (commander - Rear Admiral S.G. Gorshkov). The coordination of the forces of the fronts was to be provided by the representative of the Headquarters, Marshal S.K. Timoshenko.

On the whole, optimistic expectations prevailed among the Soviet command. Considering that the forces of only one North Caucasian Front outnumbered the enemy by almost twice and the state of the German troops after the evacuation from the Taman Peninsula was assessed as extremely depressed, the landing operation was thought of as quick and undoubtedly successful. It was scheduled to start on October 28th. Surprisingly, the Soviet landing was once again hampered by the weather, and had to be postponed until November 1st. However, this delay helped

418

few. On the night of November 1, when the landing detachments went to sea, a storm broke out with a force of up to six points. Nevertheless, the command of the operation decided to continue it, believing that under the given conditions complete surprise would be achieved. The consequences of this decision were tragic. The storm disrupted the landing. In the northern part of the strait, the landing of the forces of the 56th Army was canceled; in the southern part, they still managed to land several scattered groups from the 18th Army with a total number of up to two thousand people with an insignificant number of light guns. Small flat-bottomed vessels were partly destroyed by the enemy, partly by a storm. There was nothing to land on the rest of the landing force. The captured bridgehead near Eltigen, up to 5 km wide and about 2 km deep, had to be held by the available forces. The next day, 3,200 more people and part of the artillery were transferred to the bridgehead by newly assembled watercraft. But the suddenness that was so hoped for was not achieved. The landing was blocked, the German troops launched fierce counterattacks, which they managed to repulse only with the help of massive artillery fire from the Taman coast and the incessant strikes of the attack aircraft of the 4th Air Army. The troops of the 56th Army - the main part of the landing force - were able to land near Kerch only on November 3rd. The success of the landing was facilitated by the beginning | November, a breakthrough through Perekop of the forces of the 4th Ukrainian Front (commander - General of the Army F.I. Tolbukhin). The enemy was forced to repel the offensive both in the north and in the east. K. On November 8, 5 rifle divisions, a brigade of marines were already near Kerch, more than 9 thousand people near Eltigen, but further actions of Kerch

Sco-Eltigen landing were blocked. The enemy retained the heights that dominated the Kerch Peninsula, among which Mount Mithridates played a key role. The artillery placed on them shot through both bridgeheads, repelling attacks and not allowing any maneuver to be carried out by forces, making it extremely difficult to supply. A stalemate arose - in order to expand the bridgehead, reinforcements were needed, but it was impossible to place them because of the , insignificance of the bridgehead itself. By December 4 on the parade ground

419

75,000 people, 582 guns, 187 mortars, 128 tanks and 764 vehicles were transported darm!'.

Particularly tragic was the position of the landing force near Eltigen. The enemy blocked it from the sea. At the disposal of the German command was only a small number of light ships - torpedo boats, minesweepers, self-propelled bars, based in the ports of Kerch, Kamysh-Burun and Feodosia. The Black Sea Fleet and the Azov Flotilla had an overwhelming superiority in forces, Soviet aviation dominated the air, but they could neither ensure an uninterrupted supply of the bridgehead near Eltigen, nor the reverse evacuation of the landing force. Once again, the command of the Red Army failed to use its advantage at sea.

The change in the command and control system did not help much either. On November 20, the North Caucasian Front was disbanded. The remaining forces formed the Separate Primorsky Army under the command of General of the Army I.E. Petrov. The 18th Army was transferred to the disposal of the 1st Ukrainian Front, the paratroopers on the Eltigen bridgehead were left to their own devices. Their situation was critical - about 3 thousand soldiers and officers remained in the ranks, but ammunition, medicines and food were running out. In early December, the forces of the Primorsky Army operating near Kerch carried out fruitless frontal assaults on the adjacent heights. After repelling them without difficulty, on December 6 the enemy concentrated his efforts on liquidating the plandarma near Eltigen. It seemed that the landing was doomed. But in this hopeless situation, the paratroopers did the impossible and absolutely unexpected for the enemy - they went on a breakthrough! On the night of December 7, the landing force broke through the enemy defenses and, having made a swift march, went to Kerch. With a sudden attack, the paratroopers defeated the command post and artillery batteries of the Germans on Mount Mithridates and captured the coal camp in the southern part of Kerch.

The situation has changed dramatically. Now there was a landing party behind enemy lines, which captured the dominant height and prepared everything necessary for the landing of the council.

1 See: History of the Second World War. S. 237.

420

Russian troops directly to Kerch. Landing commander Colonel G.F. Gladkov, perfectly understanding the importance of the captured positions, instead of breaking through to the main forces of the Primorsky Army, decided to hold the captured heights. The enemy was so stunned that a group of paratroopers sent by Gladkov entered the location of the 16th Rifle Corps directly through the enemy's battle formations. And not long before this, the 16th Corps unsuccessfully stormed these very ones along Zitsia. :

Now it only remained to strike towards Gladkov's paratroopers, which could well have been supplemented by the landing of part of the forces at the Kerch Coal Pier, and the city, no doubt, would have been liberated. But hours passed after hours, and the army command did not take any action. All day long, Gladkov's paratroopers were waiting for help, constantly sending radio messages to the army headquarters. Only by the evening of December 7 did the formations of the 16th Corps make a weak attempt to attack the enemy and quickly retreated. The next morning, boats with a landing force of 380 people reached the Coal Pier, but this meager help could not change anything. German troops were already tightly blockading the defenders on Mithridates. For three more days they waited for the main forces to strike, but in vain. On December 11, the remnants of the landing - about 400 people - were evacuated from the Coal pier. Paradoxically, the rearguard of the paratroopers, who covered the evacuation, again made their way to parts of the 16th Corps directly - through the German defenses.

The rare chance to change the course of the entire front-line operation with one blow was missed. General I.E. Petrov and his staff failed to appreciate him and quickly use the opportunity that presented itself. A direct consequence of these omissions was the failure of the entire operation to liberate the Kerch Peninsula and the struggle for Kerch that dragged on for four months (!) The city was liberated only on 11 April. The attempt of the troops of General F.I. Tolbukhin to break into the Crimea from the north.

, Formations of the 51st Army, Lieutenant General Ya.G. The cruisers of s.ho Du broke through Perekop and the Turkish Wall, but got bogged down in the battles For the city of Armyansk, turned into a powerful fortified knot,

421

covering the entrance to the Crimea. Trying to turn the tide, the army commander sent the 10th Rifle Corps through the Sivash. But to repeat the success of the troops of M.V. Frunze failed in 1920 - the troops only managed to capture a small bridgehead. Meanwhile, the enemy blocked the troops that broke into the Crimea and with powerful counterattacks threw them back behind the Turetsky Wall, but managed to save the bridgehead on the Sivash. The first attempt to liberate Crimea failed.

In general, the actions of the Red Army in this direction were the same, inherent in the whole. strategy of 1943, the desire not to destroy the enemy, but to "push" him,

with the only difference that in this case it resulted in a desire to "push" the German 17th Army deep into the peninsula. Contrary to the experience of operations in 1941-1942. The Soviet command abandoned the idea of a flank landing and preferred to break through "head-on" through the fortified narrowness of Perekop and Kerch. The result of this "frontal strike" was tragic - the first attempt to break into the Crimea failed. The total losses of the Red Army and Navy, according to official data, only during the Kerch-Eltigen operation amounted to 27,397 people, of which 6,985 were irretrievable officers.

Fracture: the results of 1943.

The summer-autumn campaign of 1943, which began with the gigantic battle of Kursk, was successfully completed by the Red Army on the banks of the Dnieper. During this campaign, Soviet troops advanced 300-600 km westward and liberated almost two-thirds of the territory occupied by the enemy from occupation. Its main result was the liberation of the western regions of Russia, the Taman Peninsula, the left-bank Ukraine, access to eastern Belarus and the disruption of the German army's attempt to hold the so-called "eastern rampart" on the western bank of the Dnieper.

The Wehrmacht suffered heavy losses during the summer-autumn campaign of 1943. Up to half of all its forces were defeated

1 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 314.

422

on the Soviet-German front - 118 divisions, lost about 3,200 tanks, up to 10,000 aircraft and up to 26,000 guns. The non-German army did not have time to make up for the losses, while

The Red Army received more and more replenishment. This inequality of power became a self-sufficient factor.

From the memoirs of Field Marshal E. Manstein:

"This numerical superiority made it possible for the Soviets to attack not only in one, but often and in many areas at the same time, having an overwhelming superiority in forces. It allowed the enemy to make up for their often heavy losses surprisingly quickly. ... Of course, we did not expect from the Soviet side such great organizational skills that it showed in this area, as well as in the development of its military industry. We met a truly hydra, in which, in place of one severed head, two

new...

Wherever we had any sufficient strength, we

let the enemy attack us frontally and inflict heavy losses on him. In other cases, we tried, by timely withdrawal in separate sectors, to prevent him by advancing with superior forces to dislodge us from our positions. Repeatedly, by concentrating tank formations, we were able to stop the enemy who had broken through, and when it was possible, to use the mistakes he made - for example, when he dared to go too far ahead after the breakthrough - to deliver counterattacks.

The strategy of "squeezing out the enemy" chosen by the Soviet high command did in fact lead to dissipation of its few reserves. But still, it was not possible to surpass the German command in the maneuver of forces. The German front, despite significant losses and a difficult retreat, held out. Moreover, the danger of powerful counterattacks by the enemy forced the commanders of the Soviet fronts to fear for their flanks all the time. Reverse side

b See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 324. ? Manstein E. Decree. op. pp. 545, 566.

423.

frontal attacks became the main type of offensive in all directions. Recalling the consequences of the battles of the summer - autumn of 1943, the commander of the Bryansk Front, General of the Army M.M. Popov wrote: "Studying and evaluating the situation, we were convinced that the enemy's defense prepared in difficult forests completely excludes the possibility of achieving success through frontal attacks ... All these circumstances required us to solve the tasks facing the front on the flanks of the enemy's Bryansk grouping or on one of them. A flank attack made it possible to deprive the enemy of the strengths of his defense, already established along forests and rivers, and to withdraw the main forces of the front to the rear of the enemy.

The experience of the campaigns of 1943 clearly showed that only a broad maneuver made it possible to successfully solve the set tasks and save time. And most importantly, to drastically reduce losses. A vivid example of this is the maneuver by the forces of the 3rd Panzer Army from Bukrinsky. bridgehead to Lyutezhsky and the subsequent liberation of Kyiv. But throughout the summer-autumn campaign of 1943, the Soviet high military command, as a rule, preferred the strategy of "squeezing out the enemy."

General losses of the Soviet armed forces during the summer-autumn campaign 01.07-1.12. 1943 amounted to 2,866,714 people, incl. irretrievable losses - 725,494. At the same time, the fronts daily lost an average of 15,580 soldiers and officers in killed, wounded, captured. For comparison, the average daily losses of the Red Army in the winter campaign of 1942-1943. turned out to be two times less - 7,484 people?. During the same period, the Red Army lost 18 thousand tanks and self-propelled guns - 2.2 times more than in the winter campaign of 1942-1943.z. Among the others



reasons for the high level of losses in people and equipment was explained by the fact that during the winter campaign the actions of the Red Army in the largest operations were carried by a maneuverable attacker

1 Cited. Quoted from: Shaptalov B. Test by war. - M.: "AST Publishing House", 2002. S. 266-267. :

2 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 265. 3 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 404.

424

ny character, when it was necessary to act against the disorganized defense of the enemy.

The outcome of the hostilities in 1943 turned out to be very disappointing for Germany. In addition to heavy losses on the Eastern Front, the loss of most of the occupied territory, a crisis broke out on the Western Front as well. In May, a 240,000-strong group of Italian and German troops capitulated in Tunisia, in June the fascist regime of B. Mussolini in Italy fell, by autumn the Allies captured Sicily and the southern part of Italy. Air raids by Allied bomber aircraft caused ever-increasing damage to the economy of the Reich. The prospect is imminent. my defeat of Germany in the Second World War became more and more clear.

## TURNING IN THE ECONOMY OF WAR

One of the main factors in the ongoing fierce confrontation between the military and economic potentials of the USSR and Germany by the end of 1942 was the seizure by the Wehrmacht of new Soviet territories in the southeast of the country and the loss by the Soviet Union of a significant part of production capacity. As a result, Germany surpassed its opponent in steel production by 4 times, in aluminum production by 7 times, in electricity generation by 2.5 times, in machine tool production by almost 5 times. Particularly painful for the Soviet economy was the loss of part of the transport communications in the south of the country, which, combined with the loss of a large number of railway rolling stock and river vessels, placed the entire production system in an extremely difficult position.

At the beginning of 1943 there was a decrease of 12% in industrial production in comparison with the indicators of 1942 - in the generation of electricity, the smelting of pig iron, steel, the extraction of coal, oil, iron ore, manganese ore, rolled products, the production of aluminum, zinc and nickel. The situation is extremely complicated

`Nilas that the possibility of a further increase in output

oh ye

1 See: Great Patriotic War... S. 355.

425

military production at the expense of already involved factors - the mobilization of labor resources and the restructuring of production - have been exhausted. It remained to increase production capacity. to use the factors of intensification of production, for this purpose, at the beginning of 1943, a number of GKO resolutions were adopted. Already at the very beginning of the year, the construction of new and the restoration of destroyed industrial enterprises, power plants, coal mines, and oil producing installations began. By the end of 1943, this had yielded results—in comparison with 1942, the capacities of all power plants had increased by 14.7%, coal production by 18.9%, and oil production by 14%. Particularly impressive was the growth in the production of nonferrous metals, which is so necessary for the production of weapons - the production of nickel increased 1.5 times, magnesium - almost 2 times, hard alloys - 1.7 times, cobalt - almost 1.5 times. . The program for the restoration of industrial enterprises in the liberated regions of the country, adopted in August 1943, played a major role in increasing production. Malenkov. One of the results of the restoration work was the commissioning by the end of 1943 on the liberated territory of Ukraine of 2,376 large plants and factories, which accounted for almost a quarter of all enterprises operating in the republic before the war.

The main factor in the intensification of production was the increase in labor productivity. During the war years, the Soviet leadership applied an already tried and tested means - arbitrary competition - in practically all spheres of the national economy. By the end of 1943, more than 82% of those employed in production participated in it. Competition has become a powerful stimulus for the intensification of labor, which has yielded very tangible results. According to official data, in 1943, in comparison with 1942, labor productivity in industry as a whole increased by 7%, including 11% in machine building and the military industry. In the military industries, this growth was even more impressive - in the aviation industry up to 30%,

1 See: Great Patriotic War... S. 357-358.

426

tank - 38%! The true price of this genuine feat becomes clearer when one considers how difficult the working conditions were. So, in the process of magnesium production, the foundry workers had to carry several tons of burning metal per shift, and the furnace workers, mostly women, manually loaded more than 20 tons of coal per day. And this is at

that there was not enough food, clothing, housing. The workers still huddled in dugouts and barracks. The government took steps to change the condition of the workers. In 1943 spending on social and cultural needs increased by 24.4% compared to 1942. The average wage of industrial workers increased by 27%, primarily in the metallurgy, defense and oil industries. The wages of workers and employees of the coal industry increased by 2-2.5 times.

The most difficult third war year was for the peasantry. Although this year the Red Army liberated a significant part of the occupied territory, this did not improve the situation, since the state of agriculture in these areas was catastrophic, the scale and extent of its destruction did not even allow one to speak of any increase in food production. Moreover, the population of the liberated regions themselves were in dire need of assistance. The situation in the collective farms was aggravated by the removal from their composition in 1943 | million 260 thousand able-bodied men, which reduced their share to 32.8% of the pre-war level. The number of able-bodied women and adolescents in agriculture decreased by 710,000. To make up for these losses, the authorities were forced to attract more than 2.7 million urban residents to work. In addition to everything, the summer of 1943 turned out to be very dry. The drought hit the Volga region, the Southern Urals, Western Kazakhstan, the North Caucasus and Siberia, its scale was quite comparable to the well-known drought of 1921. In autumn, bad weather hit the central regions of Russia - long rains and early frosts caused heavy damage to crops. The lack of equipment and mechanisms forced almost all the work to be placed on the shoulders of the remaining

` Collective farmers, mostly women. Working, sparing no effort

1 Great Patriotic War ... S. 359-360.

427

health, in order to provide the Red Army with food, the collective farmers themselves, literally, remained on starvation rations.

From the memoirs of the party worker of the Novosibirsk region E.D. Tumasheva:

"The most difficult year for the region was 43. I had to be in the villages almost all the time, talking with people, organizing and helping ... Once I arrived in Mazalovo, asked the watchman where people were working ... Arriving at the station, unsaddled the horse, went up to the women. They looked tired, some of them were thrown to the side with a wave of the scythe.

I stayed with them for a long time, replacing one or the other. When they sat down to dinner, I saw that the women had brought with them in bundles. Only one of the eighteen had a piece of bread that looked like bread, the rest had three or four potatoes, and in a pot -

kah and tueskah - steamed and whitened with milk leaves (young leaves of cabbage, beets were plucked). For me, this was not new: my three children also steamed nettles and quinoa in a cast-iron until vegetables grew in the garden. But here - hard exhausting work, manual mowing - and not a gram of bread.

The most difficult working conditions in production and agriculture did not affect the patriotic upsurge of the Soviet people. The movement to raise funds for the needs of the front, which arose in 1942, continued in 1943. In December 1942-March 1943 alone, more than 7 billion 41 million rubles were received for the construction of military equipment. With this money it was possible to build about 35 thousand tanks or 70 thousand fighter planes. These funds were used to build tank columns "Krasnoyarsky Rabochy", "Kuznetsk Metallurgist", "Altai Collective Farmer", "Collective Farmer of Tataria", "Collective Farmer of Georgia", aviation squadrons, warships.

The overall result of the work of the Soviet economy in 1943 was the final consolidation of the superiority achieved in

1 Great Patriotic War ... S. 364.

428

production of all types of weapons and ammunition, over the economy of the Third Reich. A turning point also occurred in the course of the military-economic confrontation on the Soviet-German front.

#### PRODUCTION OF THE MAIN TYPES OF WEAPONS IN THE USSR AND GERMANY IN 1942-1943.

Types of weapons of the USSR  
(thousand units) / year

[Punks | m4 | 241 | 34,

Tanks and self-propelled guns  
24.4 24.1  
m7 | 252 [Minoma | 2300 | 64 | 98 | 230

The most important factor was the renewal of the fleet of military equipment that entered service with the Red Army. By the end of 1943, the share of new models of military equipment and weapons in the active army was 42.3% in small arms, more than 80% in armored weapons, 83% in artillery, and 67% in aircraft. .

The fact of a turning point in the military-economic

the opponent also noted the confrontation. At the end of 1943, General

, Colonel Jodl, in a report to the leadership of the Reich, made a disappointing conclusion: "The decisive factor for us was that, as a result of an offensive into the unexplored spaces of Russian territory, we discovered that the enemy not only had huge human resources, but also had such a technical level of military industry that you forced us into waging total war and multiplying our

1 Comp. Quoted from: History of the Second World War 1939-1945. T. 7. S. 57, 84. ? See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 362.

429

efforts in the part of the military industry! No less tragic, this circumstance was also assessed by the front command of the Wehrmacht. A

From the memoirs of Field Marshal E. Manstein:

"Under these conditions, the overstrain of the troops increased, forces were spent faster and faster. This is especially true for the core of the troops - hoofed front-line soldiers and officers. By the end of August, only our group [of armies "South"] lost seven teams

Divisional directors, thirty-eight regimental commanders and two hundred and fifty-two battalion commanders!

It goes without saying that the command of the group in their reports always presented Hitler with an unvarnished picture of these conditions and always pointed out the danger of a prolonged overstrain of the troops. But our resources have dried up! Despite the readiness of the German people to send their sons to the front, the replenishment was not enough. Astonishing as was the energy with which Hitler organized the increase in the output of military products, yet it could not be compared with the scale of the enemy's increase in production. If in the second half of 1943 we could produce about 500 tanks a month, the Soviet military industry produced several times more. We are no longer talking about deliveries from the Western powers.

In mobilizing the potential of Soviet society to achieve a turning point in the war, Soviet culture and, above all, literature played an important role. The works of A. Tvardovsky, K. Simonov, O. Bergholz, I. Ehrenburg, A. Tolstoy, M. Sholokhov, L. Sobolev, A. Korneichuk largely set the spiritual mood of the warring people. In the best traditions of Russian literature, Soviet writers were together with their people during the most difficult trials, taking on their shoulders all the hardships of the war. Of the more than a thousand members of the Union, writers

! Cit. by: Gelpukhovsky V.B. Heroism of the working class / War and society,

1941-1945: In 2 books. Rep. ed. G.N. Sevostyanov. — M.: Nauka, 2004. Book 2.S.20. ? Manstein E. Decree. op. pp. 545-546.

430

275 soldiers who went to the front did not return from the battlefields. Among them are Y. Krymov, A. Gaidar, E. Petrov, V. Stavsky, M. Kulchitsky and others. Eighteen writers were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

With the advent of the war, writers had to work in completely new conditions, the war rigidly dictated its own laws. The number of newspapers published in peacetime was halved, their periodicity and circulation decreased. Shortly after the start of the war, a clear system of military printing was established. It included five central newspapers, among which the leading role belonged to the Red Star, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper was Major General D. Ortenberg, one of the most famous correspondents was K. Simonov. Front-line, army, divisional, brigade, specialized corps newspapers appeared regularly. In 1943, 128 daily newspapers and 600 newspapers were published for the armed forces with a frequency of 3 times a week'. The news agencies Sovinformburo and TASS, the central newspapers had permanent correspondents at the front, among whom were the best writers. Thanks to their efforts, the country learned about the heroic feat of the partisan Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya (an essay by P. Lidov in Pravda, January 1942) and the feat of 28 Panfilov guardsmen who blocked the road to the capital for fascist tanks. (Essay by A. Krivitsky in Izvestia). It was in the newspapers that the works included in the treasury of Russian literature were first published - the novel "They Fought for the Motherland" by M. Sholokhov, the poem "Vasily Terkin" by A. Tvardovsky and many others.

The writers made an invaluable contribution to solving the most difficult task of mobilizing the moral potential of the people to repel the invasion. To do this, it was necessary, first of all, to reverse the pre-war moods, to inspire the idea of a deadly threat hanging over the Fatherland. One of the first to solve this problem was V. Lebedev-Kumach, who wrote already in the first hours of the war

'  
See: Baranov V.I. Writers and War/War and Society, 1941-1945.  
Book. 2. S. 130.

431

we, together with the composer A. Alexandrov, the famous song "Holy War", which became a national appeal addressed to the country:

Get up, huge country, get up for  
mortal combat

With dark fascist power, With a  
cursed eagle!

Let the noble fury Boil like a wave  
- There is a people's war, a holy  
war!

As the true nature of the German invasion, aimed at the total annihilation of the people and their culture, became clearer, the tone of the works of Soviet writers also changed. The motive of universal hatred and revenge became dominant: "I call for hatred!" (A. Tolstoy), "Kill him" (K. Simonov), "The Science of Hatred" (M. Sholokhov).

From the essay by Ilya Ehrenburg "Kill!", July 24, 1942:

"We know everything. We remember everything. We understood that the Germans are not people. From now on, the word "German" is the most terrible curse for us ... Let's not talk. Let's not get angry. We will kill. If you haven't killed at least one German in a day, your day is gone. If you think that your neighbor will kill a German for you, you do not understand the threat. If you don't kill the German, the German will kill you. He will take yours and torture them in his accursed Germany. If you cannot kill a German with a bullet, kill a German with a bayonet... Don't count the days. Don't count miles. Count one thing: the Germans you killed. Kill the German! - this is asked by the old woman-mother. Kill the German! - this is praying to you, child. Kill the German! - it screams native land. Don't move. Do not miss. Kill!."

During the war, literature was also mobilized for the solution of completely opportunistic problems. The brightest

1 Cited. by: Vir: //umowoso.g1./UU/RAREV\$ /LOW CURRENT/EKEMVOVS/  
KSHENM. NTM :

432

an example is A. Korneichuk's play The Front (August 1942), which was designed to give the public an explanation of the reasons for the unsuccessful actions of the Red Army in the first period of the war. The author solved this problem by applying the dramatic technique of opposing the two main characters - General Gorlov, a descendant of the generation of heroes of the Civil War, who seeks to absolutize "the howl of past experience, and General Ognev, a representative of a new formation of commanders who have mastered the art of modern warfare. I.V. Stalin made personal corrections to the text of the play, after which it was published in the Pravda newspaper, which in itself spoke of the importance the country's leadership attached to the fact of its appearance.

But still, despite all the horrendous cruelty of the war, the theme of hatred did not become dominant. Most of all, the soldiers' hearts responded to another call - "Wait for me!" And if the first song of the war was "Holy War", then the most popular at the front was the poem by K. Simonov "Wait for me". In every second letter from the front, the lines of Simon's call sounded:

Wait for me, I'll be back, To  
spite all deaths.

Whoever did not wait for me, let him  
say: "Lucky":

Do not understand, not waiting for  
them, As in the midst of fire

Waiting for your

You saved me

How I survived, we will know Only  
you and I, - You just knew  
how to wait, Like no one else.

Front-line lyrics found their vivid embodiment in the work of Soviet composers. Hard frontline everyday life was brightened up by the truly soldierly and folk songs "In the Dugout" by K. Listov, "Dark Night" by N. Bogoslovsky, In the Frontline Forest by M. Blanter and others. The war became a powerful stimulus for the creation of works of the classical genre, the most famous of which was the Seventh Symphony by D. Shostako

433

Vich, written and first performed in besieged Leningrad in August 1942. No less famous were the opera War and Peace by S. Prokofiev, the ballet Gayanz by A. Khachaturian.

In the general process of mobilizing the entire potential of the country, a large role was assigned to domestic science. By the beginning of the war, a powerful scientific base had been created in the USSR. Only in the Academy of Sciences, there were about 8,400 scientific workers, in the highest. The school employed 50,000 employees, including 5,783 professors and doctors of sciences and 15,294 associate professors and candidates of sciences.' Soon after the start of the war, the Soviet leadership took steps to mobilize scientific potential in the interests of defense. This was all the more necessary, since science lost many scientists already in the first period of the war - some went to the front as volunteers, some remained in the occupied territory. Many major universities were evacuated, some closed. The total number of higher education institutions has almost halved, the number of students has decreased by 3.5 times, and the number of teachers has more than doubled.



On July 10, 1941, by the decision of the GKO, the Scientific and Technical Council was created, which solved the problems of coordinating scientific research. Interdepartmental commissions and committees brought together scientists, specialists, and representatives of various institutions and departments, which made it possible to radically overcome interdepartmental barriers. At the initiative of the Academy of Sciences, regional commissions were set up to mobilize the resources of the Urals, Western Siberia, Kazakhstan and other regions, which played a major role in the use of raw materials in the country's eastern regions for defense needs. Special defense commissions were formed and successfully operated in various areas - military engineering, military sanitary, naval issues, aviation and others. Very symbolic was the creation at the end of 1941 of the Commission on the history of the Great Patriotic War.

1 Levshin B.V. Outstanding Contribution of Scientists/War and Society, 1941-1945. Book. 2. S. 78.

434

After the radical turn in the course of the war was determined, some of the most needed specialists were returned from the front. In September 1943, a government decree was adopted on the exemption from conscription into the army of students from more than 80 higher educational institutions of the country, as well as students of the penultimate and final courses of all other universities. Even then, the question of the future of science was raised, urgent measures were taken to restore it. The result of these measures was an increase by the end of the war in the total number of scientific institutions by 240 units and research institutes by 128. Academic postgraduate studies increased by almost 1.5 times compared with the pre-war level.

## FIGHT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORY

During the period of the war considered in this chapter (November 1942-December 1943), the partisan movement reached its maximum scope, by the end of 1943 the number of partisan formations reached 250 thousand people. At the same time, due to the increased effectiveness of command and control and the increased combat skills of the commanders, the combat operations of the partisans have become highly active and efficient. During this period, the most common types of actions were sabotage on enemy communications, which caused the greatest damage to the invaders, and reconnaissance in the interests of the Red Army.

Of decisive importance in achieving these results was the establishment, by the end of 1943, of stable radio communication between the Central Headquarters of the partisan movement and all formations and most of the large detachments. Radio communication provided constant

new operational leadership of the fighting of the partisans, and the shaft the opportunity to provide the partisans with weapons, ammunition and everything necessary. Communication by radio made it possible for the nartisans to timely transmit to the command of the Red

' See: History of the Second World War 1939-1945. T. 7. S. 315.

435

Army intelligence and receive the necessary instructions. It was communication that provided the highest level of coordination in the actions of army formations and partisan detachments. Thanks to stable communications, the partisans had a permanent and powerful ally - aviation. With its help, the detachments received supplies, evacuated the seriously wounded and sick, their families. Frequently, at the request of the partisan command, aviation carried out bombing strikes on concentrations of enemy troops during enemy punitive expeditions. During the war years, the pilots made more than 109 thousand sorties in the interests of the partisans. This real connection with the mainland, better than any other factors, raised the morale of the partisans and ensured the combat stability of detachments and formations. From now on, the partisans began to feel that they were part of a single combat organism of the Soviet armed forces. The creation on the occupied territory of several partisan territories and zones with an area of more than 200,000 square meters testifies to the true scope of the partisan movement. km, with a population of about 4 million people<sup>1</sup>. The most effective and efficient form of struggle of the Soviet partisans remained the struggle on communications. From the time of the Napoleonic invasion of Russia, it was precisely the extended communications that became the Achilles' heel of any aggressor.

Russia's traditional lack of good roads became one of its most important advantages in the fight against any invasion. The enemy was forced to concentrate on just one or two railway lines the supply of entire armies. Therefore, the failure of at least a few bridges or stations posed a threat to the stability of an entire section of the front.

The German army was sorely lacking in forces to ensure the security of its communications, and the partisans subjected railway lines, stations, sidings, and bridges to constant attacks. Movement along highways and dirt roads was interrupted by ambushes, mines, blockages, and pits. In July 1943, TsSHPD to ensure the actions of the Red Ar

<sup>1</sup> See: Knyazkov A.S. occupation regime. Partisan Movement/War and Society, 1941-1945. S. 283.

436

Mii developed a plan for the simultaneous mass destruction of rails in the territory occupied by the invaders. 167 partisan detachments were involved in the operation.

numbering about 100 thousand people simultaneously on the territory of Belarus, Ukraine and several regions of Russia. On the night of August 3, a massive undermining of rails began on the territory with a frontal length of about 1000 km and a depth of up to 750 km. The destruction of rails was accompanied by train wrecks, explosions of railway bridges, station buildings, attacks on enemy garrisons, which

\* offices, police stations, rear units and subdivisions divisions. The "rail war" continued throughout August and the first half of September. At the moment of the exit of the Red Army units to the Dnieper in the second half of September, the opera began. tion "Concert". This time, about 120,000 partisans were involved in operations on enemy communications. As a result of these two operations, over 360 thousand rails were destroyed, more than 2,900 echelons and 2,807 steam locomotives were destroyed, about 100 thousand Wehrmacht soldiers and officers died. The enemy was forced to completely abandon the night traffic of trains, the volume of his traffic was reduced by 35-40%. The destruction of railway communications led to massive concentrations of enemy military echelons at railway junctions and stations. The command of the Red Army unleashed assault aircraft on them, from the continuous strikes of which the enemy suffered heavy losses. In the summer-autumn of 1943, in the course of the "rail war," genuine interaction between the Soviet regular troops and large partisan forces was achieved. In general, during 1943, the partisans organized five times more train bombings, destroyed five times more enemy garrisons, headquarters and other military installations, destroyed almost four times more enemy manpower than in the previous year ...

1 See: History of the Second World War 1939-1945. T. 7. S. S. 315.

437

From the work of Colonel-General of the Wehrmacht L. Rendulich "The Partisan War":

"Regular partisans acted in close contact with the Red Army, and with the help of radio and aircraft were in constant contact with its headquarters. Among the top leadership of such partisans were many officers of the General Staff of the Red Army. The centralized leadership of the partisan detachments was obvious, because when preparing and conducting any significant offensive by the German or Russian troops, the partisans in this area immediately intensified their actions with the aim of disorganizing supplies and disrupting communications between parts of the German army, capturing and liquidating warehouses with ammunition and attacks on troop quarters. These actions became a heavy burden for the army and represented no small danger. In no other theater of operations was there such close interaction between the partisans and the regular army as in Russian. There were cases when partisan forces, numbering up to

10 thousand people. The heavily extended front of the German army made it extremely easy for the partisan formations to maneuver and retreat. Yes, and the supply of weapons, ammunition and food under such conditions does not present great difficulties for them.

set...

The Russian command used the partisans to a large extent to ascertain the situation and to track down the enemy. The partisans showed great skill and delivered very valuable material to the Soviet command.

From the memoirs of the head of the Central Headquarters of the partisan movement P.K. Ponomarenko:

"An outstanding consequence of the people's struggle behind enemy lines was that it caused stiffness in the actions of units and formations of the fascist German armies. It also affected

1 Rendulich L. Partisan war/Results of the Second World War. Conclusions of the vanquished. - St. Petersburg: Polygon, 1998. S. 146-148.

438

slowing down the use of maneuver by troops and resources, which, as you know, the Germans were masterfully able to carry out.

The continuous attacks of our partisans and underground fighters on enemy communications disrupted the operational transportation of Nazi troops, equipment and supplies. As a result of this, the fascist German command increasingly lost confidence in the ability to quickly and timely maneuver forces and means, which, in turn, noticeably weakened the combat capability of its armies.

A striking, but far from isolated, fact of the operational influence of Soviet partisans on events of front-line significance was the delay by the German command of the start of Operation Citadel on the Kursk Bulge due to the actions of partisans, with whom it was decided to deal with by separating front-line formations and what, according to the same command, it was not possible to achieve "!

Such results of the struggle of the people's avengers, not expressed in any figures, were perhaps the most outstanding help of the partisans to the fighting of the Red Army.

On the side of the enemy. One of the phenomena of the Second World War was large-scale collaborationism on the territory of countries occupied by Germany. The name of this phenomenon was given from the French word *collaboration* - cooperation, joint action. France has become one of the countries where collaborationism is most widespread. Already after the liberation, almost 42 thousand Frenchmen, among them Prime Minister Pierre Laval and Marshal Henri Pétain, appeared before

on trial for collaborating with the enemy.

Collaborationism became a mass phenomenon in the occupied territory of the USSR as well. Soviet citizens cooperated with the occupation regime in various spheres - military, political, economic, administrative. The most famous form of Soviet collaborationism was service in

1 P.K. Ponomarenko with historian G.A. Kumanev / Kumanev G.A.  
her with Stalin: candid evidence. - M.: "Epic", 1999. 132. s

439

German armed forces. The Soviet units were divided into four groups: "Eastern volunteer" formations, units of the Russian Liberation Army (ROA), construction battalions and the so-called "Khivi" (from the German NI \|- 1eve - voluntary assistants, abbreviated - Hÿ)). "Khivi" became the most numerous category of collaborators that appeared already in the first days of the war. They were used in the troops for auxiliary work - the construction of fortifications, the delivery of ammunition, repairs, etc. In 1943, "Khivi" were introduced into the states of the infantry divisions of the Wehrmacht, 2,005 people each. In total, in the German army during this period there were up to 0.5 million "Khivi".

The second largest group of those who collaborated with the enemy were combat units. Officially, their creation was announced in January 1942. Initially, when forming these units, preference was given to representatives of non-Russian peoples. From their representatives, the so-called "eastern legions" were formed: Turkestan, Azerbaijani, Georgian, Armenian, North Caucasian and Volga-Ural. As part of these legions, officer posts and non-commissioned officers were occupied by the Germans. By the middle of 1943, the Wehrmacht included 90 battalions formed from representatives of the Slavic peoples of the USSR. A year later, in the Wehrmacht, their number increased to 200.

In addition to the "Eastern Legions", as part of the German army on different fronts, and not only on the Eastern Front, the Russian National People's Army (RNNA), the Russian Liberation People's Army (RONA), the Cossack camp of General T. Domanova, the 1st Russian corps, the Cossack brigade of General A. Turkul, the 15th Cossack cavalry corps of General G. Pannvitsa, as well as individual regiments, brigades and divisions of the SS. Officers and generals from among the white emigrants took an active part in their creation.

The largest "eastern" military unit was the Russian Liberation Army (ROA). In the spring of 1945, it included three infantry divisions, a reserve brigade,

440

officer school, anti-tank brigade and aviation group. The total number of ROA was 45 thousand people. The former commander of the 2nd Shock Army of the Volkhov Front, Lieutenant General A. Vlasov, was placed at the head of the army. Parts and formations of the ROA were commanded by former senior officers and generals of the Red Army - 1 lieutenant general, 6 major generals, 1 brigade commissar, 1 brigade commander, 42 colonels, 1 captain of the 1st rank, 21 lieutenant colonels, 2 battalion commissars, 49 majors. Aviation squadrons were headed by the former captain of the Red Army Air Force Hero of the Soviet Union S. Bychkov and former senior lieutenant Hero of the Soviet Union B. Antilevsky!. Vlasov tried to present his defection to the side of the enemy as an act of conscious struggle against the Stalinist political regime.

From an open letter from Lieutenant General A.A. Vlasov "Why did I take the path of fighting Bolshevism?" , March 1943:

"Soviet power did not offend me in any way. I am the son of a peasant, I was born in the Nizhny Novgorod province, I achieved a higher education, I studied for pennies. I accepted the people's revolution, joined the ranks of the Red Army to fight for land for the peasants, for a better life for the workers, for a brighter future for the Russian people...

, And Votya saw that nothing of what the Russian was fighting for born during the Civil War, as a result of the victory, he did not receive more wikis. I saw how hard life was for the Russian worker, how the peasant was forcibly driven to the collective farm, how millions of Russian people disappeared, arrested without trial or investigation...

And then the war broke out ... I saw that the war was being lost for two reasons: because of the unwillingness of the Russian people to defend the Bolshevik government and the created system of violence, and because of the irresponsible leadership of the Army, interference in its actions by large and small commissars ...

! Perezhogin V.A. Issues of collaborationism/War and society,

with B2 book. Rep. ed. G.N. Sevostyanov. - M.: Nauka, 2004. Book. 2. . 301.)

441

I clearly realized that the Russian people would be drawn by Bolshevism into a war for the alien interests of the Anglo-American capitalists... So wouldn't it be a crime to continue to shed blood? Isn't Bolshevism, and in particular Stalin, the main enemy of the Russian people? Is it not the first and sacred duty of every honest Russian person to take up arms against Stalin and his clique? ... my duty is to call on the Russian people to fight for the overthrow of power more-

vikov, to the struggle for peace for the Russian people, for the cessation of a bloody, unnecessary war for the Russian people ... "".

But despite their full readiness to actively fight against the Soviet authorities, the leaders of the Third Reich did not care for Vlasov

. trust. The decision to form the ROA was taken only towards the end of the war, when an acute shortage of reserves forced the Wehrmacht command to use every opportunity to increase the size of the army. The formations of various kinds of collaborators thrown onto the Eastern Front did not differ in combat stability. In March 1945, the 1st division of the ROA under the command of the former Soviet colonel S. Bunyachenko began hostilities as part of the Vistula Army Group. But her first combat experience was unsuccessful. Thrown into the offensive against units of the 33rd Soviet Army, which held a bridgehead on the left bank of the Oder, the Vlasovites suffered heavy losses, their morale was suppressed, and the division was soon withdrawn to the rear. In the end, the German command preferred to use parts of the ROA to fight the partisans in Yugoslavia and for rear service in the territory of Western Europe.

The attempt to use Vlasov as a political leader was also unsuccessful. In September 1944, Himmler offered the former Soviet general to head all the anti-Soviet organizations that existed in the Reich and in the territories occupied by the Wehrmacht. To do this, in November, a political center was created - the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia (KONR) - Vlasov prepared a manifesto proclaiming as the main tasks - the overthrow of the Stalinist regime, the termination

| Reader on national history (1914-1945) / Under the control of A.F. Kiseleva, E.M. Shagin. - M.: Vlasov, 1996. S. 543-546.

442

wars and the conclusion of an honorable peace with Germany, the creation of a new free people's state without Bolsheviks and exploiters. But this was opposed by the leaders of a number of Caucasian national committees that existed on the territory of Germany, who declared that the leadership of their activities by a Russian general was unacceptable.

In addition to the aforementioned armed formations, the Wehrmacht collaborators included employees of the German workers' battalions; at the end of 1942, according to German data, there were about 15,000 of them! Auxiliary police detachments provided great assistance to the occupying authorities. They were formed in settlements and numbered from 3-5 to 50-100 people. The actions of the police were rated quite highly by the Germans: "The police have proven themselves well everywhere and today are an essential factor for pacifying the country ..." the head of the rear area of Army Group Center reported to Berlin in December 1942. "Today it is already impossible to do without assistance of the local police..."?. According to the German authorities, by the end of 1941, in the auxiliary detachments

Noah police numbered 60,420 Soviet citizens.

The reasons for Soviet collaborationism were very diverse, from everyday to worldview. The number of Soviet people who consciously entered the service of the enemy turned out to be quite large. Many of them suffered during the years of Stalinist repressions themselves or had repressed relatives. Collaborationism in the Western territories was caused by strong anti-Soviet sentiments. But there was something else. Voluntarily and conscientiously served the enemy many former party and state functionaries - secretaries of party organizations, chairmen of the executive committees of Soviets, judges, etc.

It can be said that during the war years, representatives of all strata of Soviet society were involved in cooperation with the enemy.

<sup>1</sup> Perezhogin V.A. Issues of collaborationism/War and society, 1941-1945. S. 302.

? There. S. 304.

3 Ibid.

As for the majority of the civilian population, their cooperation with the enemy was forced due to the practical impossibility of obtaining a livelihood for their families. For a large number of prisoners of war, the unbearable conditions of captivity played a decisive role. Representatives of the national minorities of the Soviet Union were guided by other motives. Often the incentive for their cooperation with the enemy was the desire for national independence, which was reinforced by the obvious miscalculations of the Soviet national policy.

Cooperation with the enemy of a certain part of the population was the reason for the mass deportation during the war years of a number of national minorities of the Crimea, the Volga region and other regions of the country. The Germans living in the Autonomous Republic of the Volga Germans and in other territories were the first to be repressed. In accordance with the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of August 28, 1941, about 1.5 million Soviet Germans were resettled in the eastern regions of the country. In 1944, hundreds of thousands of Balkars, Ingush, Chechens, Karachais, Kalmyks, Crimean Tatars, Meskhetian Turks, Bulgarians and Greeks were resettled in Siberia, the Urals, Kazakhstan and Central Asia. And although after the death of I. Stalin, these unreasonable and inadequate measures of the Soviet leadership were condemned, and the rights of the repressed peoples were restored, the consequences of this violence have not been finally overcome to this day.

The size of the Soviet population involved in various forms of cooperation with the enemy is still a subject of controversy among researchers. Foreign historians believe that their number reached 1-1.5 million people. Domestic-



nye researchers give figures in the range of 200-800 thousand '. Such significant discrepancies in determining the number of Soviet collaborators are explained by the clearly insufficient knowledge of such a serious problem.

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 4. S. 154.

444

## USSR AND ALLIES IN 1943: A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE

The relations of the allies in the anti-Hitler coalition in 1943 developed in an incomparably more favorable environment than a year ago. The successes of the Red Army at Stalingrad and Kursk, the successful operations of the Anglo-American troops in North Africa - all this created a background that greatly contributed to the strengthening of allied relations. 1943 was a period of unprecedented diplomatic activity - five conferences were held to resolve military and political issues. In January, a conference of heads of powers was held in Casablanca (Morocco). Stalin refused to come because of the difficult situation at the front. The main issue of this conference was the discussion of the directions of the next Allied strike after the completion of the campaign in North Africa. Under pressure from the British delegation headed by W. Churchill, it was decided to land in Sicily in order to withdraw Italy from the war. The results of the conference were communicated to Stalin in a lengthy telegram in which the British Prime Minister expressed the hope that joint action by the Allies "could force Germany to its knees in 1943." The Soviet leader once again recalled the need for the allies to land in France "in order to prevent the enemy from recovering ... so that the strike from the West would not be postponed until the second half of the year, but would be struck in the spring or early summer".

A kind of consolation for the Soviet leadership was the announcement by the leaders of the United States and Britain of their firm intention to "send the maximum flow of supplies to Russia." In the first months of 1943, Allied deliveries did increase noticeably. But in the spring, when, after the winter offensive, the Red Army was especially in need of replenishment of weapons and supplies, the Allies announced their decision to stop sending northern convoys under the pretext of concentrating German naval forces in Norway and preparing landing operations in the Mediterranean. On the Soviet leader

This news had a discouraging effect.

And

; Cit. Quoted from: Churchill W. World War II. In 3 books / Abbreviated translation from English. - M.: Military Publishing House, 1991. Book. 2.T. 3-4. pp. 619-620, 622-623.

445

From the message of I.V. Stalin to W. Churchill, April 2, 1943:

"I understand this unexpected act as a catastrophic reduction in the supply of military raw materials and weapons to the Soviet Union by Great Britain and the USA, since the route across the Great Ocean is limited in tonnage and not very reliable, and the southern route has a small capacity, which is why both of these the routes cannot compensate for the interruption of the supply on the northern route. It is clear that this circumstance cannot but affect the position of the Soviet troops.

Despite all the assurances of readiness to resume sending convoys by the northern route as soon as the opportunity arose, they were resumed only in November 1943 after persistent reminders from the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR that "further postponing the sending of northern convoys due to the danger of navigation in North Atlantic is deprived of any foundation. For the time remaining until the end of the year, the Allies managed to send only six convoys. As a result, their total number turned out to be even less than last year?

The crisis in supplies coincided with a complication in relations between the Allies over relations with Finland and Poland. In March, the US government offered its mediation services in negotiations between the USSR and Finland on the subject of concluding a separate peace. The goals of American diplomacy were obvious - to strengthen their positions in Finland. But the reaction of Soviet diplomacy was extremely painful. Stalin immediately sent a letter to W. Churchill, in which he declared the unacceptability of such mediation, believing that it violated the obligations of the parties to renounce separate negotiations with Germany and its allies?. The "Polish question" turned out to be even more acute. In April 1943, German radio announced the destruction of 14,500 Polish soldiers by the NKVD.

1 Cited. Quoted from: Correspondence of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR with the Presidents of the United States and the Prime Ministers of Great Britain during the Great Patriotic War. M., 1976. T. 2. S. 168-169. |

? See: Churchill W. Decree. op. S. 635. 3 Ibid. S. 629.

446

servicemen in the camps near Katyn in the spring of 1940. A few days later, the world press published an appeal by the Polish government in exile in London to the International Red Cross with a request to investigate this crime of the Soviet authorities. The reaction of the Soviet government to this Polish demarche was immediate and harsh. The Soviet ambassador in London, I. Maisky, conveyed to Churchill a special message from Stalin, in which he

plausible accusations" and announced the severance of diplomatic relations with the Polish government in exile: on May 19, US President F. Roosevelt, wishing to overcome the chill that had arisen in relations with Stalin, sent his special envoy Joseph Davis, former ambassador to the USSR, to Moscow. J. Davis, who arrived in the Soviet capital, expressed his greatest admiration for the struggle of the Soviet people and the Red Army against the "invasion of the Huns", declaring that this epic "will never be forgotten as long as people love freedom and freedom." But the main goal of the Davis mission was to arrange a personal and secret meeting between Stalin and Roosevelt, even without the participation of W. Churchill, in Alaska at the end of July. During this meeting, it was supposed to discuss the current situation on the fronts of the world war and remove the misunderstandings that had arisen in relations. Stalin took Davis's mission very seriously and demonstrated his attention to him in every possible way. On the same days, the dissolution of the Comintern was announced in Moscow. This sensational announcement was perceived in the West as a demonstrative step forward. On May 26, Stalin announced in a letter to Roosevelt that he agreed to a meeting with a limited number of participants, once again emphasizing the extreme importance of the Allied landings in France in the coming months at a time when the Wehrmacht was preparing a new large-scale offensive on the Eastern Front.

It seemed that the Davis mission had achieved an obvious success, and the ice of distrust in the relations of the Allies had finally melted. But the ending of this attempt turned out to be quite different. The real Crisis of Confidence was ahead. While Davis was in Moscow,

447

From May 12 to May 25, a new conference of the heads of the allied powers was held in the capital of the United States. Churchill and Roosevelt discussed issues of military strategy. The British delegation succeeded in imposing its point of view, the landing in Sicily became the first priority, and the date for the opening of the front in France was postponed to 1944. On June 4, President Roosevelt informed Stalin about the decisions of the conference. Stalin was extremely unpleasantly surprised and annoyed by such a "manoeuvre" of allied diplomacy. Davis's mission took on a connotation of ambiguity and a distraction for Stalin. He demanded an explanation. Churchill tried to shift all the blame onto the United States, explaining everything by the unpreparedness of the American army for an amphibious landing and a greater interest in waging war in the Pacific. When Stalin reminded his coalition partners of the promises made a year ago, Churchill responded quite sharply: "The reproaches that you now throw at your Western allies do not touch me ... Our right and duty to act in accordance with our convictions" '. Stalin also took a hard line. Soviet ambassadors were recalled from Washington and London. On August 14-24 a new Anglo-American conference was held in Quebec. Roosevelt and Churchill discussed the rapidly changing situation on the fronts of the war. The fall of the Mussolini regime in Italy opened up new prospects for Allied action, and the possibility of an invasion of the mainland through the Balkans (in Churchill's figurative expression, "the soft underbelly of

Europe") more and more attracted British strategists. As a result, the Allies decided to continue the offensive in Italy, launch an invasion of Normandy in the spring of 1944, and hold a joint meeting of the heads of the three Allied powers at the end of the year. The preparations for the first full-fledged allied summit - the "Big Three" - were decided at the conference of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, England and the USA, held in Moscow on October 19-30, 1943. From the very beginning, the Soviet delegation raised the question of the date of the landing of the British

b Cited. Quoted from: Correspondence of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the SSS.R...T. 1.C. 134

448

Rican troops in France, but the allies, using a number of pretexts, evaded its exact fixation. The reaction of I.V. Stalin's response to another attempt to evade the fulfillment of the obligations assumed by the allies was rather restrained: "We will not demand what our allies are not able to do"! The participants of the conference achieved greater success in discussing other issues - the conditions for signing a joint declaration by the USA, Great Britain, the USSR and China on the need to establish an international organization based on the principle of sovereign equality of all peace-loving states, the formation of a special commission to develop proposals for the creation of the United Nations. Questions were discussed about the post-war structure of Germany and the policy of the allies towards Italy, the restoration of the sovereignty of Austria.

The meeting of the "Big Three" took place on November 28 - December 1, 1943 in Tehran, its main goal was to agree on plans for further actions. By the time of the meeting, the prospects for the continuation of the war seemed very positive. Victory over Germany seemed only a matter of time - the allied armies won one victory after another, Italy had already withdrawn from the war, Hitler's remaining allies were only looking for an opportune moment to break off relations with him. But there were also problems. The main one remained the different orientation of the interests of the allies. Britain and the USA clearly gave priority to national interests realized in the Mediterranean and the Pacific Ocean, the Soviet Union sought to mobilize common resources in the interests of crushing Germany in Europe. The issue of opening a second front in France became a kind of "Gordian knot" of allied relations. The leaders of Britain and the USA did not heed the persistent reminders of Soviet diplomacy about the need to fulfill their obligations. An incomparably more powerful stimulus was provided by the victories of the Red Army in the grand battle of Kursk.

'  
Cit. In: The Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 385.

Analyzing the situation shortly after the end of the Battle of Kursk, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff came to the conclusion: "Russia occupies a dominant position in the Second World War and is a decisive factor in the forthcoming defeat of the Axis in Europe. While in Sicily two non-German divisions confront the troops of Great Britain and the United States, the Russian front pins down about 200 non-German divisions. When the Allies open a second front on the Continent, it will certainly be secondary to the Russian front, the Russian will continue to play the decisive role. It is impossible to defeat the Axis countries without Russia's participation in the war in Europe!

Impressed by these successes of Soviet weapons, F. Roosevelt admitted: "If things continue in Russia as they are now, then it is possible that next spring the front will not be needed!" This possibility was in no way included in the plans of the American administration, which proceeded from the fact that the Allied troops should occupy most of Europe, and Berlin was to be captured by the American army. The British had their own plans. W. Churchill considered the timely capture of the Balkan Peninsula to be the most important task. As a result, on the eve of the Tehran Conference, there was still no consensus among the allies on the question of the timing and location of the opening of a second front in Western Europe. |

The conference began with the question of a second front. From the very beginning, he acquired an extraordinary poignancy. Stalin was forced to raise the question of opening a second front seven times. Roosevelt announced the decision taken in Quebec to launch an invasion of France on May 1, 1944, but did not rule out further advances in Italy and the Adriatic region. The most offensive position was taken by W. Churchill, who furiously argued the need for a landing in the Balkans. "Whenever the Prime Minister insisted on an invasion through the Balkans," F. Roosevelt later recalled, "everyone present was

1 Cited. Quoted from: Sipols V.Ya. Foreign Policy/War and Society, 1941-1945. Book. 1.C. 392.

450

It's clear what he really wants. First of all, he wants to drive a wedge into Central Europe in order to keep the Red Army out of Austria and Rumania, and even, if possible, into Hungary. Stalin understood this, I understood it, and so did everyone else."

Stalin defended the need for a landing in France (Operation Overlord), but when he found out that the question of the commander of the operation and those responsible for its preparation and conduct had not yet been resolved, he was forced to declare that this entire operation "is. is only a conversation." At the moment when the discussion about the specific timing of Operation Overlord reached its highest intensity, I.V. Stalin suddenly got up from his chair and, turning to Voro-

Shilov and Molotov, said with irritation: "We have too much to do at home to waste time here. Nothing worthwhile, as I see it, does not work. There was a real threat of disruption of the entire conference. W. Churchill, in response to this, hastened to declare: "Marshal misunderstood me. The exact date can be called - May 1944 ". This polemical device of Stalin played a decisive role in turning the discussion into a constructive direction. In response, the head of the Soviet delegation undertook to simultaneously launch an offensive on the Eastern Front and promised to enter into

, war in the Far East after the defeat of Germany.

The readiness of the Soviet Union to enter the war with Japan had a strong influence on the position of the American side. The war in the Pacific has reached its climax. The advance of the Japanese army was stopped, but the offensive of the American armed forces met with such fierce resistance from the enemy that there was a real threat of developing into an extremely protracted and bloody campaign. A concentration of efforts by the allied powers was required. Britain's resources in this region remained extremely scarce, and the entry of the USSR into the war could change the entire course of the war. Therefore, Roosevelt and Churchill, with deep satisfaction,

! Cit. In: The Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 2. S. 390. ? There. S. 391.

451

they accepted Stalin's statement about entering the war in the Far East.

An equally important part of the conference was the discussion of the post-war structure of the world. The most acute was the question of the fate of Germany. F. Roosevelt proposed dividing Germany into five independent parts. W. Churchill tended to think about the separation of Prussia from the rest of the country. I.V. Stalin eventually put forward the variant of the demilitarization and democratization of Germany, with the complete elimination of fascism and the Wehrmacht, and the prosecution of Nazi leaders. The issue was eventually referred to the European Advisory Commission in London.

、  
|

Among others, no less acute, was the question of Poland. By that time, this problem had become a constant in the relations of the allies. Each of the parties sought to ensure its dominant influence in the future independent Poland. The British delegation insisted on restoring relations between Moscow and the Polish government in exile in London. Americans generally supported this idea. The situation was extremely aggravated by the position of the émigré government itself, which declared on the eve of the conference that it did not wish to negotiate with the USSR and asked that American and British troops be stationed in Poland to prevent clashes with Red Army units. In response, Stalin briefly outlined the Soviet position: "We are for the restoration of Poland. But

we separate Poland from the government in exile in London." In general, the Soviet delegation spoke in favor of the revival of a strong and independent Poland, the return of its ancestral lands in the west, but in favor of the reunification of the western and eastern territories of Ukraine and Belarus.

The question of the future world security organization was also discussed in Tehran. Roosevelt outlined the already developed plan for including more than 50 states in the future organization, creating an executive committee of representatives of 10-11 countries and a police committee consisting of the USA, the USSR, Great Britain and China. W. Churchill proposed co3-

452

to give instead of a global organization separately - European, Far Eastern and American. But the Soviet delegation supported the American version of a unified world organization.

In general, the conference in Tehran marked the beginning of a regrouping of forces within the coalition. The Soviet Union achieved an equal position in the coalition, the basis for this was its huge contribution to the fight against Germany. The participants of the conference coordinated the issues of coordinating the strategic plans of the three leading powers and outlined the general contours of the post-war order of the world. The overall result of the conference was the strengthening of trust and mutual understanding between the allies.

Part U  
FAST!

The combat operations of the Red Army in 1944 were called "Stalin's ten blows" in Soviet historiography.

Their common result was the liberation of Soviet territory and access to Eastern Europe.

According to the assessments of the Soviet commanders and the recognition of the enemy, the actions of the Red Army during this period were distinguished by high dynamism and skill. Indeed, in the course of the campaigns of 1944, such brilliant operations as Belorusskaya (Bagration plan), Korsun Shevchenkovskaya and Yassko-Kishinevskaya were carried out, culminating in the encirclement and capture of large groups of the German army. In terms of the boldness of the idea, the decisiveness of the implementation and the results achieved, they clearly resembled the successes of the Wehrmacht in 1941, moreover, the actions themselves took place practically in the same western territories of the USSR.

In his annual speech on the day of the celebration of the 26th anniversary of the October Revolution, I.V. Stalin, rev. rushing towards the army and navy, he determined the prospects for the war in 1944: "In the great battles with the sworn enemy, you won

major victories, covering the battle banners of the Red Army and the Navy with unfading glory. The Red Army and the Navy now have every opportunity to completely clear Soviet soil of German invaders in the near future! In his close circle, already in December 1943, the Supreme Commander

TI.V. Stalin about the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union. - M. 1946. S. 42.

454

The speaker expressed himself more definitely: "... in the spring we will completely crush the Germans and in the summer we will end the war".

For Germany, the situation at the beginning of the new year of the war remained extremely difficult. Under the onslaught of the Red Army, the Wehrmacht was forced to retreat further and further west. The war was approaching the borders of the Reich faster and faster. The landing of the allies in Sicily, the loss of Italy and the expected new Anglo-American landing in Europe fettered the actions of the German command. In this situation, as suggested by the Chief of Staff of the Supreme High Command of the Wehrmacht, V. Keitel, there was only ONE thing left - "stubbornly defending every inch of land in the east", a hundred. to bilize the Eastern Front, to keep Soviet troops away from the borders of Germany, to build up forces in the West at the expense of new formations, to repel the invasion of Anglo-American troops into Western Europe?.

To a large extent, the situation of early 1943 was repeated, with the difference that now the German command did not set itself the task of seizing the strategic initiative in the east. The Soviet command, like a year ago, planned to liberate the occupied territory and complete the destruction of the enemy as a result of a powerful offensive along the entire front - from Leningrad to the Black Sea. The final decision was made at a joint meeting of the Politburo of the OK VKP (6), the State Defense Committee and the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command in mid-December 1943.

The balance of forces on the Soviet-German front by the beginning of 1944 made it possible to realize such ambitious plans of the Soviet leadership.

| It is noteworthy that Stalin associated this prediction with the need to produce by the spring of 1944 500-600 new heavy tanks I and 1500 new medium tanks T-34-85. And although by the specified date these tanks were given twice as many, the war dragged on for another year. (See: Malyshev V.A. "Ten years will pass, and these meetings will not be restored in memory" Source, 1997. 5. P. 123,126). in 2 See: History of the Second World War, 1939-1945. T. 8. M.: Military Publishing,

77. P. 22.



3 Ibid. S. 48.

455

#### THE RELATION OF FORCES OF THE SIDES ON THE SOVIET-GERMAN FRONT TO THE BEGINNING OF 1944.

The general offensive plan prepared by the General Staff, as in 1943, provided for a series of encirclement operations. But if a year ago such a plan did not find understanding with the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, now Stalin

- changed his attitude to the idea of the environment. On the eve of a new military campaign, he directly told Marshal G.K. Zhukov: "Now we have become stronger, our troops are more experienced. We not only can, but must carry out encirclement operations"<sup>2</sup>.

The study of the actions of the Red Army at the final stage of the war provides grounds for posing a new group of questions that form the key problem of this chapter. How did the Soviet military-political leadership manage to ensure the high level of effectiveness of the Red Army's combat operations in 1944-1945? And what explained the examples of failures and failures of individual operations? Very promising for the study of the Great Patriotic War as a whole is the question of the combination of the actual military and political motives of the Soviet Headquarters and specifically I.V. Stalin in the process of making a decision to conduct the final operations of the war in the spring of 1945. In general, the key problem of this chapter can be formulated as follows - how effective and adequate was the advice

<sup>1</sup> See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Military historical essays. - Book 3. M., 1999. S. 426.

<sup>2</sup> Zhukov G.K. Memories and reflections. In 3 volumes. Volume 3. 10th ed. - M.: Publishing House of APN, 1990. S. 95-96.

456

what model of leadership in armed struggle at the final stage of the war, when the interests of politics began to prevail over the needs of combat operations?

The final period of the war 1944-1945. became the time of the triumph of Soviet weapons - the impressive pace of the offensive was combined with spectacular strikes and encirclement operations both in Europe and in Manchuria. By this time, the majority of Soviet military leaders had really mastered the skill of conducting large-scale offensive operations, the Soviet economy had reached the peak of military production.

leadership, the allies advanced on Germany from the south and west, without stopping the most powerful strategic air raids. It seemed that the Third Reich under these conditions was bound to collapse after the very first blows. But the resistance of the German army continued until the very last days, practically unabated. Under these conditions, the highest level of military leadership was required from the command of the Red Army. And this level has been demonstrated more than once. A number of operations of the Red Army of the final period entered the treasury of the national military art. But at the same time, there was something else - the highest level of losses that remained and a number of outright failures and real failures. A number of decisions of the Headquarters on conducting operations caused doubts among the commanders of the fronts and armies as to their validity and expediency. In the same period, the nature and model of leadership on the part of the Stavka, more precisely, I.V. Stalin. As a result, the picture of the final period of the war also acquired an ambiguous and sometimes contradictory character.

## DESTRUCTION IN UKRAINE

"After the retreat in 1943, the German command tried with all its might to hold on to the right-bank Ukraine, restoring communications with the 17th Army cut off in the Crimea. The blow was dealt by four Ukrainian fronts formed at the end of 1943. After replenishment and reinforcement, they numbered 2,230 thousand people, 2,015 tanks and self-propelled guns, 2,600 combat aircraft,

457

28.6 thousand guns and mortars. The Soviet troops were opposed by Army Groups "South" and "A" under the command of the best generals of the Wehrmacht - Field Marshals E. Manstein and E. Kleist. They consisted of 1,760 thousand people, 2,200 tanks and assault guns, 1,460 combat aircraft, 16.8 thousand guns and

mortars.

The fighting, which covered a gigantic space from Polissya to the Black Sea, went down in history as the Dnieper-Carpathian strategic operation, which lasted from December 24, 1943 to May 6, 1944. Ten independent front-line operations were carried out within its framework, among which the most famous were the Zhytomyr- Berdichevskaya, Korsun-Shevchenkivska and Nikopol-Krivorozhskaya.

The plan of the Soviet command assumed a general defeat of the southern flank of the German front and the exit of the Red Army to the borders of southern Poland, the Carpathians and the Balkans. On December 24, 1943, the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front started the offensive first. Manstein's longtime rival, General N.F. Vatutin had every opportunity to finally get even for all his previous failures. The Soviet commander had at his disposal almost a million strong grouping - seven combined arms (13, 18, 27, 38, 40, 60 and 1st Guards) and two whole tank armies, their actions from the air were covered by the 2nd Air Army.

Vatutin delivered the main blow around the flank of the German 4th Panzer Army, which was still threatening Kyiv, with an exit through Zhито Miri Berdichev to Zhmerinka.

The offensive began successfully, and by the end of December 28, Vatutin's troops, having quickly broken through the defenses, went 100 km deep into the enemy zone. Manstein, quickly assessing the danger, decided to make his favorite tank attack on the flank, but the only available reserve - the 1st Panzer Army at that time was defending the Nikopol salient. Feldmar Shall turned to Hitler with a proposal to withdraw troops from the splinter of the Dnieper, leaving the Nikopol bridgehead. But once again political considerations prevailed, and Hitler,

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 3. P. 33. 2 See History of the Second World War, 1939-1945. T. 8. S. 66.

458

having agreed to the transfer of part of the reserves from Nikopol, he categorically forbade the general withdrawal.

The large-scale success of the [th Ukrainian] was also unexpected for the Soviet Headquarters. There was an idea to use it. Commander of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, General of the Army I.S. Instead of attacking Krivoy Rog, Konev was given the task of moving to Kirovograd and Pervomaisk to encircle the main forces of the 8th German Army, which still held a ledge on the Dnieper near the city of Kanev. Part of the forces of the 1st Ukrainian Front was deployed to meet the troops of Konev. The new idea of the Headquarters, thus, united the differently directed actions of the two neighboring fronts. But she had one drawback - she appeared after the start of the offensive. And as a result, the 2nd Ukrainian Front had to change the direction of the main attack along the way, regrouping the main forces of the front from the left flank to the center in just five days. The offensive of the front of General I.S. Konev began on the morning of January 5 and at first developed successfully. The strike groups broke through to a depth of 20 km, bypassing Kirovograd. But the insufficiency of the preparation of the offensive immediately affected. It was not possible to completely suppress the enemy's defenses, and the front command had to bring the 5th Guards Tank Army into battle. She broke through the defenses, but lost up to half of her combat strength.

On January 8, the tank and mechanized corps of the 2nd Ukrainian Front liberated Kirovograd, but there were no forces left to join Vatutin's troops and encircle the 8th German Army. Formations, especially tank formations, suffered too heavy losses. On January 16, the front went over to the defensive. The 1st Ukrainian Front still continued the offensive, but on January 12, Manstein, having received the necessary reserves, launched a counterattack on his formations in the Zhmerinka area, and on January 15 the further advance of Vatutin's troops was stopped. The offensive of the 3rd and 4th Ukrainian fronts, carried out on January 10-11 in order to eliminate the Nikopol bridgehead, did not give any results - the troops could not even break through the defense

enemy.

The main reason for the failures of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th Ukrainian fronts

459

became a mediocre lack of strength. Paradoxical as it may seem, but despite the one and a half superiority in people, aviation and artillery, the Soviet command did not have enough strength to complete the successfully launched strike. All the same old shortcomings had an effect - the offensive was planned on a wide sector, and the forces of the attackers were distributed among four fronts. When the troops of General Vatutin achieved success, additional reserves were required, but there were none. I had to transfer them from other areas. In this situation, again, everything was decided by the outcome of the competition of the opposing sides in the maneuver of reserves, and in this the Soviet military leaders were still inferior to the enemy. The outcome of the offensive of Vatutin's troops could have been completely different if the reserves of the 3rd and 4th Ukrainian Fronts had been thrown not into frontal attacks on the Nikopol bridgehead, but into the already created breakthrough in the sector of the 1st Ukrainian Front.

A new offensive of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts began after a ten-day break, during which the troops received reinforcements. This time the Headquarters set the decisive task of encircling the enemy forces. On January 24-26, both fronts, quickly breaking through the German defenses, rushed to meet each other. The enemy did not fail to inflict tank counterattacks on the flank of the attackers, and on January 27 the two corps of the 5th Guards Tank Army of the 2nd Ukrainian Front that had broken through were cut off from the main forces, the place of the breakthrough was again closed. Front Commander General I.S. Konev found himself in a situation that was repeatedly repeated in 1942-1943, when the formations that had broken through into the depths of the enemy defenses themselves fell into encirclement. As a rule, such breakthroughs ended in tragedy - the encircled troops took up defensive positions in anticipation of help, it was not possible to establish their supply, and they were destroyed by the enemy. But this time Konev decided to act differently - one of the tank corps was ordered to take up defense, and the second - to break through to join the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front. As a result, on January 28, Konev's tanks met in the Zvenigorodka area with the advanced units of the 6th Tank Army, which operated as part of

460

Vatutin front. These actions of the Soviet tankers mixed up the plans of the enemy, which Konev took advantage of and again broke through the German front. Formations of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, rapidly moving inland, created an internal and external encirclement front.

By January 31, in the Soviet ring near Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi, there were 7 German divisions and one brigade with units

amplification. According to Soviet data - about 80 thousand people, according to the enemy - no more than 54 thousand! Almost immediately, fierce battles broke out both on the external and on the internal front of the encirclement. The troops of Konev and Vatutin simultaneously tried to cut the encircled grouping and repelled enemy attacks from the outside. The situation has become extremely difficult. Manstein tried at all costs to get those surrounded out of the cauldron. In the ring itself, the combat effectiveness of the troops remained very high. The combat log of the 2nd Ukrainian Front of February 7 notes: "Despite the fact that the German grouping has been completely surrounded for several days ... despite the complete failure to liberate those surrounded from the south ... and the obvious impossibility of getting out of this fire th ring ... there are no facts of demoralization and disorganization in the troops of the encircled German divisions. Units are being taken prisoner, resistance is stubborn, counterattacks do not stop. This phenomenon emphasizes once again that we are still fighting a very strong, stubborn and stable army. The more valuable and significant is our victory over the enemy?"

The German army once again demonstrated amazing resilience, loyalty to military duty and a high level of combat capability in very difficult conditions. The soldiers and officers of the encircled units hoped that the high command would not leave them. And indeed, the delivery of everything necessary by air and the concentration of strike formations for a deblocking strike soon began. Field Marshal E. Manstein advanced from the Vinnitsa region to the outer stake

1 See: Konev I.S. Notes of the front commander. - M.: Voice, 2000. S. 181; Manstein E. Lost victories. — M.: AST, 2002. S. 616.

2 Quot. by: Konev I.S. Decree. op. S. 188.

461

Four tank divisions encircled the 1st Ukrainian Front, and four other tank divisions attacked formations of the 2nd Ukrainian Front.

The fierceness of the fighting grew with every day and every hour. The enemy's tank strikes from the outside became more and more dangerous, his forces were growing, and to dismember the encircled group

The Soviet troops never succeeded. The nervousness of the Soviet command also grew. February 12 I.V. Stalin called Marshal G.K. Zhukov, who coordinated the actions of both fronts.

From the memoirs of Marshal G.K. Zhukov:

"The Supreme said:

- Konev called me just now and reported that Vatutin had a

whose enemy broke through from the Shanderovka area to Khilki and

,New Future. Do you know about it?

- No, I do not know.

- Check and report back.

I immediately called N.F. Vatutin and found out: the enemy really tried, using a snowstorm, to break out of the encirclement and had already managed to advance two or three kilometers, occupied Khilki, but was stopped.

After talking with N.F. Vatutin about taking additional measures, I called the Supreme Commander and reported to him what I learned from the message from the commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front volume. .

J.V. Stalin strongly scolded me and N.F. Vatutin, and then said:

- Konev proposes to transfer to him the leadership of the troops of the internal front to liquidate the enemy's Korsun-Shevchenko group, and to concentrate the leadership of the troops on the external front in the hands of Vatutin.

"The final destruction of the enemy group in the cauldron is a matter of three or four days," I answered. - The transfer of control of the troops of the 27th Army to the 2nd Ukrainian Front may delay the course of the operation.

J.V. Stalin said in a heightened irritated tone:

- Fine. Let Vatutin personally deal with the operation of the 13th and

462

. 60th Army in the region of Rovno-Lutsk-Dubno, and you take upon yourself the responsibility of preventing the breakthrough of the enemy strike group from the Lisyanka region. All".

From the memoirs of Marshal I.S. Konev:

"On February 12, 1944, at about 12 o'clock, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief called me over the HF. Stalin, angry, said that we had announced to the whole world that in the Korsun-Shev region of Chenkovsky we had surrounded a large enemy grouping, and the Headquarters had information that the encircled grouping had broken through the front of the 27th Army and was leaving for its own, and asked:

- What do you know from the situation at the front with a neighbor? ..

"Don't worry, Comrade Stalin. Surrounded by opponents, the nickname will not leave. Our front has taken action...

Stalin asked: | R

Did you do this on your own initiative? After all, this is beyond the delimiting front line ...

- Yes, in his own way, Comrade Stalin ...

- This is very good. We will consult at Headquarters, and I will call you. |

Indeed, after 10-15 minutes, Stalin called again:

- Is it possible to subordinate all the troops operating against the encircled grouping, including the 1st Ukrainian Front (27th Army), to you and entrust to you the leadership of the destruction of the encircled grouping?

I did not expect such an offer, but I answered without a pause:

— Comrade Stalin, it is very difficult now to transfer the 27th Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front to me. The 27th Army operates from the back side of the encirclement, that is, from the opposite side to our troops, from a different operational direction ... while the battle is going on in the corridor, it is impossible to establish direct contact with the 27th Army. The army is very weak, stretched out on a wide front. She will not be able to keep the surrounded enemy... |

To this, Stalin said that the Headquarters would oblige the headquarters of the 1st Ukrainian front to transmit all my orders and instructions to the 27th

Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. S. 112.

463

army and leave it to supply in the 1st Ukrainian Front. I replied that in such a dynamic environment this form of administration would not ensure the reliability and speed of transmission of orders. And now you need personal communication and communication in a short way. All orders will be delayed.

“All right, we'll still consult at Headquarters and with the General Staff, and then we'll decide,” Stalin ended the conversation!

After two hours, Stalin, by his directive, assigned the overall leadership of the liquidation of the encircled grouping to Konev, Vatutin received the task of preventing the enemy from breaking through from the outside, and Zhukov's tasks were limited to coordinating the actions of the fronts on the outer ring of encirclement.

From the memoirs of Marshal G.K. Zhukov:

“N.F. Vatutin was a very impressionable person. Having received the directive, he immediately called me and, believing that I was the initiator of this transfer, said with offense:

- Comrade Marshal, someone, someone, but you know that I, without closing my eyes for several days in a row, strained all my strength to carry out the Korsun-Shevchenko operation. Why am I being suspended now and not allowed to complete this operation? I am also a patriot of the troops of my front and I want Moscow to salute the fighters of the 1st Ukrainian Front with a hundred faces of our Motherland.

I couldn't tell N.F. Vatutin, whose proposal was not to push him against I.S. Konev. However, I believed that in this case N.F. Vatutin is right as a commander, taking care of the combat, well-deserved glory of the troops entrusted to him.

- Nikolai Fedorovich, this is the order of the Supreme Commander, we are soldiers, let's unconditionally follow the order ... "2.

Meanwhile, the situation of the encircled became desperate. On February 4, the Soviet command gave them an ultimatum to surrender, guaranteeing their lives and return to Germany or any other country after the end of the war. The ultimatum was rejected, and on the night of February 16-17, Feld

1 Konev I.S. Decree. cit.: pp. 195-196. 2 Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. pp. 113-114.

464

Marshal Manstein ordered the troops in the Soviet pocket, abandoning all heavy weapons, to break through to meet the 3rd Corps, whose tanks, hopelessly bogged down in impenetrable mud, nevertheless punched a corridor to exit the pocket. By the time the operation began, a fierce February blizzard had risen, the columns of German troops, almost blindly, without firing a shot, launched an attack on the positions of the very weakened 27th Army. Having quickly broken through its defenses, the German columns rushed on. Konev tried to stop the breakthrough by throwing the tanks of General Rotmistrov and the Cossacks of General Selivanov into the flank of the enemy. The breakthrough turned into a nightmare. "In this frenzied race," recalled one of the surviving German soldiers, "cars overturned, throwing wounded people to the ground. A wave of Soviet tanks overtook the first vehicles and captured more than half of the convoy; this wave rolled over the wagons, destroying them one by one like matchboxes, crushing wounded people and dying horses! Across the vast field in all directions, firing on the move, Soviet tanks moved with lit headlights, after them the Cossacks with naked swords did not merge. | Nevertheless, a significant part of the German troops managed to get out of the encirclement. Manstein in his memoirs estimated their number at 30-32 thousand soldiers and officers? Did Soviet researchers unanimously reject these data, arguing that only a few escaped from the cauldron, while 18,000 were taken prisoner, and 55,000 people died in encirclement and during a breakthrough from it? According to official data, the losses of both Soviet fronts in the Korsun-Shevchenko operation amounted to about 80,000 killed and wounded.' Stalin praised the merits of the commander of the 2nd



Ukrainian Front of Army General I.S. Konev, he was the first of the commanders of the fronts during the war years was awarded

® Cit. by: Beshanov V.V. Ten Stalinist blows. - Minsk, 2003. S. 177. 2 See: Manstein E. Decree. op. S. 616.

3 See: History of the Second World War, 1939-1945. T. 8. S. 75. In his memoirs, the front commander I.S. Konev gives other data - 11 thousand prisoners and 52 thousand killed. (See: Konev I.S. Decree. Op. P. 212).

4 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book Z3. S. 37.

465

the rank of Marshal of the Soviet Union, and the commander of the 5th Guards Tank Army P.A. Rotmistrov became the first and only marshal of the armored forces among the commanders of tank armies during the entire war. |

From the memoirs of Marshal G.K. Zhukov:

"As we expected, on February 17, everything was over with the encircled grouping ... On February 18, the capital of our Motherland saluted the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front. And not a single word was said about the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front. As a former Deputy Supreme Commander, to whom the troops of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts were equally close and dear, I must say that I.V. Stalin was deeply wrong in not mentioning the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front in his order, who, like the soldiers of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, fought heroically against the enemy troops wherever the front command and the Headquarters directed them. Regardless of who and what reported to I.V. Stalin, he had to be objective in assessing the actions of both fronts. Why I.V. Stalin allowed such injustice is still unclear to me. This remarkable operation was organized and carried out by the troops of two fronts. I think that this was not an excusable mistake of the Supreme.

Simultaneously with the Korsun-Shevchenkovsky operation, the troops of the right flank of the 1st Ukrainian Front continued their offensive in the Polesie region. The advance in this direction was very promising, allowing at the same time to split the front of the two army groups "South" and "Center" and to deeply envelop the left flank of the southern group of Germans, which created the threat of another encirclement. In late January - early February, the 13th and 60th armies carried out the Rovno-Lutsk operation, a feature of which was the massive use of cavalry. In modern historical literature, the point of view has spread that the cavalry of the Red Army

1 Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. pp. 114-115.

466

volume of the Civil War. In fact, the cavalry retained significant combat potential as a branch of service. Often, she had capabilities that were not available to either infantry or tanks. Everything depended only on the skill of its competent use, which was clearly manifested during the winter offensive of the Red Army in 1942, which showed examples of brilliant, extremely effective actions of the cavalry corps in the German rear, and suicidal attacks of horsemen on the organized defense of the enemy. But in 1944 came the "finest hour" of the red cavalry, whose actions proved to be decisive in a number of operations. During the offensive in Polissya, the 1st and 6th Guards Cavalry Corps of the 13th Army became the main striking force due to their mobility, inaccessible to tanks during the spring thaw.

Already on the first day of the offensive on January 27, both corps managed to covertly enter the gap and found themselves in the depths of the enemy defenses. On January 29, the cavalry quite unexpectedly attacked the rear communications of the Germans near the city of Rovno, an important point of the entire enemy defense in this direction. On February 2, the city was liberated. The horsemen very successfully interacted with the partisan formations of S.A. Kov paka, A.N. Saburova, I.F. Fedorov. A massive offensive through the swamps of Polesye seemed to the German command to be completely impossible, which largely predetermined the success of the 1st Ukrainian Front. K. On February 11, the troops of his right wing managed to advance to a depth of 120 km, reaching the flank of the entire Army Group South.

At this time, the troops of the 3rd and 4th Ukrainian fronts finally managed to solve the 'Nikopol problem' by freeing the territory of the large bend of the Dnieper. The initial plan of the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command provided for the encirclement of the entire enemy grouping on the Nikopol bridgehead with counter attacks of the 3rd Ukrainian Front (commander - General of the Army R.Ya. Mali Novsky) from the north and the 4th Ukrainian Front (commander - General of the Army F.I. Tolbukhin ) from South. The actions of the two fronts were coordinated by the representative of the Headquarters Marshal A.M. Vasilev

467

sky. But the fronts' attempts to break through the enemy's defenses in January proved fruitless. The German troops, contrary to the expectations of the Soviet command, did not even think of leaving the "Nikopol ledge", but to break their resistance

to strength.

From the memoirs of Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky:

"... The 3rd and 4th Ukrainian fronts undertook several

repeated attempts to defeat the Nikopol-Krivoy Rog enemy grouping, but were not successful: there was a lack of manpower and equipment, an acute shortage of ammunition ... However, it was clear that we could not capture the Nikopol bridgehead on our own. If we continue fighting in the same way, we will suffer unjustified losses, but still we will not solve the problem. It was necessary to connect the 2nd Ukrainian Front, regroup the troops, replenish the troops of F.I. Tol Bukhina reserves ... I.V. Stalin did not agree with me, reproaching us for our inability to organize the actions of the troops and control the combat operations. I had no choice but to sharply insist on my opinion. Raised tone I.V. Stalin was involuntarily pushed to the same response. Stalin hung up. Fyodor Ivanovich, who was standing next to me and hearing everything, said with a smile:

"Well, you know, Alexander Mikhailovich, out of fear I almost crawled under the bench."

Despite such a sharp reaction from Stalin, the reserves were received - one combined arms army consisting of six divisions, one mechanized and one rifle corps. On January 30, the 3rd Ukrainian Front struck in the direction of Krivoy Rog. The German command mistook it for the main offensive and transferred their reserve there - two tank divisions. At this moment, General R.Ya. Malinovsky and delivered his pre-planned main blow. The enemy front was broken through, and the 4th mechanized

1 Vasilevsky A.M. The work of a lifetime. In 2 books. - M.: Politizdat, 1990. Book. 2. S. 77-78.

468

corps, which began a rapid advance to the rear of the entire German grouping. K. On February 5, the depth of the breakthrough reached 60 km, an important communication center Apo canteen was captured. The formations of the German 6th Army were split in two. The situation escalated sharply after the 4th Ukrainian Front also went on the offensive, the breakthrough of its 2nd mechanized corps created a close and real possibility of closing the "Soviet tank pincers" in the rear of the entire Nikopol grouping. A catastrophe was again approaching the troops of the ill-fated German 6th Army. On February 8, Soviet troops liberated Nikopol. But nevertheless, the German command managed, literally at the last moment, to create a group of General Scherner from the remnants of several divisions, who saved the entire Nikopol grouping, providing it with a corridor 8-12 km wide for retreat. The exhausted Soviet mech corps could no longer break through Scherner's defenses.

"Severe mudslides did not allow us to intercept all the paths from the enemy's move," Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky, - however, his heavy weapons and military equipment became the property of our troops. I have seen a lot of mudslides in my lifetime. But such mud and such impassability as in winter and spring of 1944

years, never met before or after. Even tractors and tractors skidded. The gunners carried the cannons. The fighters, with the help of the local population, carried shells and cartridges on their hands from position to position for tens of kilometers.

But it was not so much the thaw, which turned out to be no less difficult test for the enemy, who was certainly much less adapted to the fight against "General Mud". The miscalculations of the Headquarters, which strove to conduct an offensive in all directions at once, also had an effect. The result of this was offensive tasks set literally before each front, while the expediency of an attack on the bridgehead near Nikopol could well be replaced by a deeper advance of the 2nd Ukrainian Front to the south. This would not

evasive withdrawal of the enemy is simply a matter of time due to  
==

1 Vasilevsky A. M. Decree. op. S. 78.

469

wide-ranging threats. At the same time, there were not enough shock connections for everyone. Instead of a tank army, only a mechanized corps was allocated to the 3rd Ukrainian Front as the main strike force. Mistakes were also made by the command of the fronts, who often preferred the capture of large cities to the prospect of reaching deep behind enemy lines:<sup>1</sup>. The main result of the battles on the right-bank Ukraine was the deep, up to 150-250 km, advance of the Red Army in the most difficult conditions of the beginning of the spring thaw. This offensive led to a strong weakening of the southern flank of the German front. Enemy divisions that escaped encirclement, after the loss of heavy weapons and part of the personnel, turned out to be incapable of combat for a long time. The calculations of the command of the Wehrmacht on the possibility of stopping the further offensive of the Red Army on the prepared lines failed.

## FAILURES ON THE WESTERN DIRECTION

Against the general background of the victorious offensive of the Red Army, the actions of the Western Front in late 1943 - early 1944 look especially striking. In the period from October 1943 to April 1944, the front under the command of General of the Army V.D. Sokolovsky carried out eleven (!) front-line operations - and in fact did not achieve any tangible result. And this is in conditions when it included five combined arms armies (33 rifle divisions), 3 artillery, 2 cannon and one mortar divisions, a tank corps, 9 separate tank and 8 artillery brigades, the front was covered by the 1st Air Army? . In the sector of only the last March offensive, General Sokolovsky concentrated 9 rifle divisions, 10 artillery brigades, 6 artillery regiments.

kov RGK, over 70 tanks against two infantry divisions, 5 artillery regiments and 40 enemy tanks. But even with such a superiority in strength, the result remained the same. End result of efforts

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book Z3. P. 39. 2 See: Shtemenko S.M. General Staff during the war years. - M.: Military publishing house,

1968, p. 227.

470

the entire front within six months was the advance of troops in certain directions for several kilometers. The price for these kilometers was colossal - the front lost more than half a million (!) People in killed and wounded. A striking contrast against this background were the actions of the neighboring Belorussian Front, General of the Army K.K. Rokossovsky. In the same period, the front carried out three operations and advanced 200 km, while losing two and a half times fewer soldiers and officers.

The purpose of the operations of the Western Front was to destroy the new Smolensk ledge, formed as a result of the withdrawal of German troops in the southern direction. On the western side, they firmly held the defense, dangerously hanging over the flank of the front of General Vatutin, which had broken through into Polissya. In addition, the ledge played the role of a kind of "unsinkable aircraft carrier", German aircraft from its numerous airfields constantly threatened the rear of the neighboring Soviet fronts, moving further and further west. By the beginning of 1944, the deepening of the Smolensk ledge towards Moscow had reached 150 km, which could not but unnerve Headquarters. The situation with the Rzhev-Vyazemsky "balcony" was repeated, which the Soviet troops stormed for more than a year. It would seem that this experience, bought at such a high price, should have helped the Soviet military leaders. Moreover, General Sokolovsky, for a total of more than a year and a half, was the chief of staff of the Western Front during the campaigns of 1941-1943, he went through the school of Marshal Zhukov, who led this front in 1941-1942. However, the history of the war showed once again how little one's own experience can mean.

For six months, General Sokolovsky exhausted his own troops, trying all the same frontal attacks to break through the German defenses, but each time the offensive ended in nothing. In April 1944, Stalin's patience finally ran out and a special commission arrived at the front, headed by GKO member G.M. Malenkov. It is impossible to call its activity in revealing unsuccessful actions of the front under Chin strictly objective, since the conclusions were already prepared in Moscow, and the question of

The reality of the tasks assigned to the front and their security. 1 See Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book Z3. S. 11.

471

solutions by means were not even considered. Malenkov searched for the guilty, it did not take long to look for them. Very soon, the commission revealed glaring facts in the style of commanding troops, both by the front commander himself and by his subordinates. In fact, the front commander himself, General of the Army V.D. Sokolovsky, and his staff did not fulfill their direct duties.

From the report of the GKO commission, April 11, 1944:

"The main reason for the failure of operations on the Western Front is the unsatisfactory leadership of the troops on the part of the front command.

The command of the Western Front, instead of studying shortcomings and eliminating them, showed complacency, arrogance, did not reveal shortcomings, did not take into account mistakes, did not teach people, did not educate commanders in the spirit of truthfulness. The biggest shortcomings and mistakes were repeated in all operations. The reason for this is the unacceptable fact that the analysis of operations, the issuance of final orders on shortcomings and the results of military operations on the Western Front were not practiced ... The command of the front does not tolerate criticism, attempts to criticize shortcomings are met with hostility ... Such an atmosphere has been created in the front and people are brought up in such a way that they are afraid to raise questions about shortcomings before the front command. There were timid attempts on the part of individual commanders of the branches of the armed forces to point out the shortcomings in the actions of the branches of the armed forces and to analyze them in the order, but the front commander rejected such TORTURES ...

The front commander, Comrade Sokolovsky, is cut off from his closest assistants - the commanders of the branches of the armed forces and the heads of the services, does not receive them for many days and does not resolve their issues. Some deputy commanders did not know the tasks of their branches of service in connection with the operations being carried out, not to mention the fact that they were not involved in the development of operations. For example: the commander of the BT and MV, Lieutenant General of the Tank Forces Rodin, said: "I have never been asked how best to use tanks. I am only a dispatcher and send tanks first to one army, then to another. Than tasks

472

I recognized the military troops in the armies or from subordinate tankers.

Both the commander himself and his staff were only engaged in the work of the ranks, transmitting the orders of the Stavka to the troops and controlling their execution. In addition, the commander was at a distance of about 100 km from his headquarters, and he had at his disposal only one colonel (!), acting as adjutant. It is noteworthy that General Sokolovsky regarded this situation as quite normal. No wonder

It is noteworthy that the headquarters practically did not engage in its direct work - planning operations, but turned, according to the definition of the commission, into a "statistical bureau". The operations were planned and carried out by the army command, on their own

'own directions. As a result, the front constantly scattered its forces and did not solve a single task.

The use of artillery and tanks was badly organized at the front. "In the operations carried out, our artillery," Malenkov's commission noted, "despite its concentration in large quantities and its superiority over the enemy's artillery, did not suppress the enemy's fire system both during the artillery preparation and during the battle. Often, artillery fired at an empty place, did not fulfill the orders of the infantry, lost interaction with it, and sometimes even fired at its own infantry. The infantry went on the attack on the unsuppressed enemy fire system, suffered huge losses and did not move forward. According to the data of the Sanitary Administration, in the course of some operations of the front, the loss of infantry from shrapnel wounds reached 80%. In other words, the unsuppressed artillery and mortar batteries of the Germans shot with impunity the advancing lines of infantry. Part of the losses were also due to "friendly fire", including direct fire from our own batteries.

The situation with the use of tanks was hardly worse. The front had at its disposal the 2nd Guards Tatsinsky Tank Corps, which became famous for its dashing raids on the rear of the enemy during the offensive near Stalingrad. One of

1 See: Great Patriotic... S. 449-450.

473

the best in the Red Army, it was manned by well-trained crews and experienced commanders. But the corps was blatantly illiterately used during the fruitless attacks of the 33rd Army. In December 1943, during an unsuccessful offensive in the Vitebsk direction, when the infantry once again failed to overcome the unsuppressed enemy defenses, the corps was thrown into battle and was shot at by disguised German batteries, losing 60 tanks. In January, another similar offensive reduces the combat effectiveness of the corps to zero without any result. In the end, it included only two (!) Tanks. So completely mediocre and senseless were lost tanks, and, most importantly, perfectly prepared

lazy crews.

The commission assessed the actions of the 33rd Army itself as extremely unsatisfactory; for the total time of the offensive, its losses amounted to over 50% of the losses of the entire front. The main reason for this was the downright criminal, so-called "hard" style of command of Colonel-General V.N. Gordov (former commander of the Stalingrad Front in July-August 1942): "Nowhere was the battle organized so poorly as in

Mia Gordova. Instead of careful preparation of the operation and organization of the battle, instead of the correct use of artillery, Gordov sought to break through the enemy defenses with manpower. The infantry again and again rushed to the offensive and suffered huge losses. In order to replenish them, the commander of the 33rd Army, "contrary to the instructions of the Headquarters, which forbade the use of special units in battle as ordinary infantry, often sent scouts, chemists and sappers into battle. Among the most serious misdeeds of Gordov are the facts when Gordov sent the entire officer corps of the division and corps into the chain. The level of losses not only of privates, but also of officers in the army was monstrously high - during the offensive operations of the front, "4 division commanders, 8 deputy division commanders and division chiefs of staff, 38 regiment commanders and their deputies and 174 battalion commanders were killed and wounded. ".

General Gordov reinforced his "hard" style with swearing and

474

insults, death threats. But the threats were by no means empty. The Commission learned that in March 1944, "by order of Gordov, Major Trofimov was shot without trial or investigation, allegedly for evading combat. In fact, as established by the investigation, Major Trofimov was not to blame. However, neither the colossal losses of the army, nor the direct crimes of the general changed the attitude towards him on the part of the front command, which "continued to consider him the best army commander." It is not difficult to imagine what kind of atmosphere reigned in the 33rd Army: "According to the statement of a number of commanders who worked with Gordov, the inhuman attitude towards people, sheer hysteria tormented them so much that there were cases when commanders could not command their formations and units."

° The facts uncovered by the commission produced a shocking impression and provided grounds for the adoption of very severe measures, in the case of Gordov, up to the transfer of the case to a military tribunal. All the more striking was the content of the order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief following the results of the work of the commission. Front Commander General of the Army V.D. Sokolovsky was removed from his post and appointed chief of staff of the 1st Ukrainian Front, which at that time was commanded by Marshal G.K. Zhukov, who replaced the deceased N.F. Vatutin. In the same place, under the command of Zhukov, the "main culprit" turned out to be General Gordov, with the only difference being that he was not even demoted, receiving in return another, this time the Guards, army. In fact, the "tough commander" got off with a warning that "if he repeats the mistakes (!) he made in the 33rd Army, he will be reduced in rank and position." The chief of staff of the front received the same warning.

General lieutenant A.P. Pokrovsky, he also retained his former position. The commander of artillery, Colonel-General I.P., suffered the most. Camera - he was detached



1 It is noteworthy that G.K. Zhukov in his memoirs does not comment on the appearance of Generals Sokolovsky and Gordov under his command. Apparently, saving their careers, the marshal took his former subordinates to him.

475

dismissed and placed at the disposal of the commander of artillery of the Red Army.

This unexpectedly "mild" punishment of the command of the Western Front by Stalin, who was not at all inclined to "forgiveness", suggests that in this case a kind of "personnel policy" of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief manifested itself. In a much more innocuous situation, Stalin happened to be extremely blunt.

From the memoirs of Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky:

"Early in the morning of August 17 [1943], while at the forward command post of the 46th Army, I received from I.V. Stalin the following document: "To Marshal Vasilevsky. It is already 3:30 am on August 17, and you have not yet deigned to send a report on the results of the operation for August 16 and on your assessment of the situation to Headquarters. I have long ago obliged you, as an authorized representative of the Headquarters, to send to the Headquarters by the end of each day special operations

reports. Almost every time you forgot about this duty of yours and did not send reports to Headquarters.

August 16 is the first day of an important operation on the Southwestern Front, where you are authorized by the Headquarters. And now you again deigned to forget about your debt to the Headquarters and do not send reports to the Headquarters.

For the last time I warn you that if you let your debt to the Headquarters be forgotten even once again, you will be removed from the post of Chief of the General Staff and will be recalled from the front ... I. Stalin.

This telegram shocked me. In all the years of my military service, I have not received even a single small remark or reproach addressed to me. All my fault in this case was that on August 16, while in the army of V.V. Glagolev as a representative of the Headquarters, I really delayed the next report for several hours ... I will only add that Stalin was so categorical not only in relation to me. He demanded such discipline from every representative of the Headquarters.

The explanation for such a different reaction of Stalin should be sought in

1 Vasilevsky A.M. Decree. op. pp. 40-41.

476

that Vasilevsky's minor fault was regarded by him as a hint of possible disobedience. In the case of Gordov and Sokolovsky, on the contrary, both were distinguished by absolute diligence, sometimes even excessive. But in Stalin's eyes, this could in no way be a crime, or even a misdemeanor. Even the outright crime of Gordov, who ordered the execution of an innocent person, was completely "justified by the situation", by the desire to fulfill the order at all costs: "It is better for us to be killed today," the general admonished his subordinates, "than not to complete the task." This "super-loyalty" of Gordov saved him in the end. The fact that everything that Sokolovsky and Gordov did on the Western Front was not perceived by Stalin as a crime is evidenced by their further career. Army General Vasily Danilovich Sokolovsky remained until the end of the war in the direct subordination of Marshal G.K. Zhukov, first as chief of staff, then as first deputy front commander. In April 1945, he was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, and after the war, in 1946, "for outstanding services in the leadership of troops" he received the highest military rank of Marshal of the Soviet Union and a golden weapon. Colonel General Vasily Nikolaevich Gordov commanded the 3rd Shock Army until the end of the war, was three times awarded one of the highest military orders - Suvorov 1st degree and in April 1945 was awarded the highest award - the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. But as soon as the general, after the war, had only voiced his condemnation of Stalin and his policies, he was immediately arrested and shot. |

A direct consequence of the work of the Malenkov Commission was the disbanding of the Western Front itself, which, it was believed, had completed its tasks. Instead, in April 1944, the 2nd Belorussian (commander - Colonel General I.E. Petrov) and 3rd Belorussian (commander - Colonel General I.D. Chernyakhovsky) were created by the directive of the Headquarters. It is these fronts, together with the previously created 1st Belorussian Front, General K.K. Rokossovsky had to solve Chi's tasks that were not completed by General V.D. Sokolovsky.

'  
See: Pikhoya R.G. Soviet Union: History of power. 1945-1991. — M.: Publishing House of the RAGS, 1998. S.52-53.

477

BREAKTHROUGH TO THE BORDER

The defeat of the German troops near Korsun endangered the entire northern flank of Army Group South, and its command again offered Hitler to withdraw troops to the west. But, as before, the Fuhrer was categorical. He again refused Manstein, citing his favorite argument: "After all, someday the Russians will stop advancing! Since July of last year they have been conducting a continuous offensive. It can't go on for long!" Hitler believed that the depletion of reserves and mudslides would slow down the Soviet offensive, but he was wrong this time too. The only

The only thing Manstein managed to do in this situation was to gather everything he could get into a fist - two tank corps and three infantry divisions in the hope of fending off the expected new blow of the Red Army in the south. The forces are more than modest, especially if we take into account the next large-scale plan of the Soviet Supreme High Command, which planned to destroy the southern flank of the enemy front on the 700-kilometer front from Lutsk to the mouth of the Dnieper with simultaneous powerful strikes, completing the liberation of right-bank Ukraine.

Manstein alone had to take on the blows of four Soviet fronts. 1st Ukrainian Front of Army General N.F. Vatutina was to strike, bypassing Army Group South from the north and cutting off its path to the west. 2nd Ukrainian Front Marshal I.S. Koneva struck in the forehead with the task of cutting the enemy forces, moving in a straight line to the Dniester. From the north, the attackers were covered by the newly created 2nd Belorussian Front, Colonel General P.A. Kurochkin, from the south - 3rd Ukrainian Front of Army General R.Ya. Malinovsky, who was to liberate Nikolaev and Odessa. The troops of the Red Army were to reach the state border of the USSR from Brest to the mouth of the Danube.

The actions of the 1st and 2nd, which began in March. The Ukrainian fronts could be called a "battle in the mud", since from the very beginning the spring thaw literally swallowed up the Soviet

1 Cited. In: The Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book.Z. S. 40.

478

troops and German armies. Not only cars, but also tanks got stuck in the mud, as horses always helped out, and when they were powerless, the whole burden, both literally and figuratively, fell on the shoulders of people - both soldiers and civilians.

Impenetrable mud fettered the actions of the main striking force of the Soviet offensive - two tank armies: the 3rd Guards General V.M. Badanov and 4th Panzer General P.S. Rybko. With great difficulty, they advanced 80 km and you went to Ternopil. But even this insignificant advance alarmed Manstein, and he threw his reserve against them - 9 tank and 5 infantry divisions. Marshal G.K. Zhukov later compared this battle to the Kursk Salient, with up to 1,300 tanks and self-propelled guns taking part in it. The offensive of the 1st Ukrainian Front was stopped. It seemed that the super-experienced German field marshal, the master of the counterattack, managed to succeed once again. However, now he was opposed by Marshal Zhukov, who replaced the mortally wounded General Vatutin on March 1. Zhukov concentrated colossal forces, including three (!) Panzer armies, which managed not only to repel Manstein's favorite counterattack, but, having dealt a retaliatory strike, reach the Dniester. The 2nd Ukrainian Front was no less successful. March 5 Marshal I.S. Konev, having concentrated his shock fist - two tank armies - managed to

tear the German defenses, his troops came out kr. The Southern Bug and I March, reinforced by another tank army, crossed the Dniester on the move and seized bridgeheads on its right bank. As a result, Konev's troops split Army Group South, separating units of the 8th Field and 1st Tank Armies.

On March 6, the 3rd Ukrainian Front also launched an offensive. On the very first day, a cavalry-mechanized group of General I.A. Pliev. The cavalry once again proved that in off-road conditions the cavalry has a significant advantage over the infantry and mechanized units. Pliev's group made a deep raid on the rear of the enemy and went to the rear of a large German grouping, numbering 13 divisions. But it was not possible to complete the encirclement - the horse-mechani Zirovannaya group suffered too heavy losses. coman

479

Field Marshal E. Kleist, commander of Army Group A, managed to withdraw his troops beyond the Southern Bug, however, due to impenetrable mud, almost all heavy weapons had to be abandoned. |

Meanwhile, Marshal Zhukov, having approved a new plan at Headquarters, began an operation to encircle the troops of the 1st German Panzer Army. Seven (!) armies of the 1st Ukrainian Front, including three armored ones, were to close the ring around [8 enemy divisions. On March 24, the troops of the front crossed the Dniester on the move, and five days later they crossed the Prut, capturing the large regional center Chernivtsi. Formations of the 4th tank army of General D.D. Lelyushenko and the 3rd Guards Tank Army of General P.S. Rybalko closed the ring around the enemy grouping. The position of the encircled German troops was critical. It was necessary to immediately break out of the "cauldron", but disagreements arose again among the Wehrmacht command.

From the memoirs of Field Marshal E. von Manstein:

"... the Führer in general [was] in agreement that the 1st Panzer Army would push its way to the west to establish contact with the rest of the troops. However, he continued to demand that she hold basically the same section of the front between the Dnieper and Ternopil. It was not clear where, in this case, the armies would get the forces to strike to the west in order to recapture their rear communications from the enemy. The situation was exactly the same as near Stalingrad in December 1942. And then Hitler was ready to agree with the attempt of the 6th Army to break out of the encirclement - towards the 4th Panzer Army, which was approaching with the aim of deblocking. But at the same time, he demanded that Stalingrad be held at the same time, and this meant that the 6th Army was not in a position to release forces to break out of the encirclement...

... I added that the condition for the success of the breakthrough of the army proposed by me to the west is a counterattack from the 4th

tank army. For this purpose, the 4th Army must be immediately provided with reinforcements.

To this, Hitler stated that he did not have the opportunity

480

allocate forces for this. As long as he has to reckon with the possibility of an invasion in the west, he cannot remove a single formation from there. He also called the stay of our divisions in Hungary absolutely necessary - for political reasons ... There was a sharp dispute between Hitler and me, during which he tried to blame me for the unfavorable development of events on the army group front.

In order to withdraw to Hungary, the 1st Panzer Army had to break through to the south, which was also insisted on by its commander, Colonel General Hube. Nevertheless, Manstein got his way, and in early April the blow was delivered in a northwestern direction, while the command of the 1st Ukrainian Front expected the Germans to break through to the south. Marshal G.K. Zhukov subsequently admitted that the direction of the enemy's exit from the encirclement was determined incorrectly and the enemy managed to slip out? But this was Manstein's last success. On March 31, he was removed from command of Army Group South. Together with him, the commander of Army Group A, E. Kleist, was removed from his post and dismissed.

The breakthrough of the 1st Panzer Army of General Hube from the encirclement made it possible to strengthen the defense in the Lvov direction and did not allow the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front to break through to Lvov, as the Stavka demanded. At this point, the offensive of the Soviet troops stopped, a respite was required.

Impressive successes during the spring offensive were achieved by the 2nd Ukrainian Front of Marshal I.S. Konev. K. On March 25, his troops reached the site along the border of the USSR with Romania along the Prut River. A new stage of the war began - the liberation campaign of the Red Army in Europe. In this connection, the Soviet government made a statement on April 2, 1944, which stated that the Soviet state did not pursue the goal of acquiring any part of the Romanian territory or changing the existing social order of Romania. The entry of Soviet troops into its borders was motivated solely by military necessity and continued resistance.

\* Manstein e. Decree. op. S.637-639. 2 See:  
Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. pp. 120-121.

16 A. Kilichenkov 481

enemy. In April, the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front continued their offensive on the territory of Romania.

At the end of March, the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front began an operation to liberate Odessa and Nikolaev. Two days later, the enemy's defenses on the banks of the Southern Bug were broken through and Nikolaev was liberated. The key role in the course of this operation was played by the daring landing of the sailors of the Black Sea Fleet. 67 Marines under the command of Senior Lieutenant K.F. Olshansky, after an unexpected landing, captured part of the Nikolaevsky port and fought a fierce battle in full encirclement for two days, repelling 18 attacks. On the morning of March 28, advanced units of the Red Army broke into the city. Of the entire landing force, 13 sailors survived. For an unprecedented feat, all 68 paratroopers were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Trying to cut off the retreating German and Romanian troops, General R.Ya. Malinovsky brought into battle a horse-mechanized group of General I.A. Pliev. And again the horsemen did not disappoint. Leaving the tanks assigned to them, which fell behind due to the mud, they broke into operational space and immediately captured the key Razdelnaya railway junction, cutting off the escape routes of 12 German and Romanian divisions. They had to hastily retreat to Odessa, to the crossings across the Dniester and the Dniester Estuary. But still, the horsemen of General Pliev did not have enough strength to reliably surround this grouping. Moreover, having reached one of the crossings, one of Pliev's divisions itself was surrounded and suffered heavy losses. In addition, another task was set before the group by the command of the front - to reach the seashore. As a result, by mid-April, the encircled enemy managed to cross the Dniester Estuary, avoiding encirclement. On April 10, the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front liberated Odessa, which remained under occupation for a long 30 months, and managed to capture a number of bridgeheads on the right bank of the Dniester.

Impressed by the successes achieved, General Malinovsky and his staff planned a "rush" to the Prut and the Danube in just 10 days. The rate approved the plan without changes. But in 20 days of the operation, the front was not even able to cross the Dniester, retaining only the previously captured bridgeheads. By May 10, the offensive would

482

lo stopped, and the troops went on the defensive. The command clearly overestimated its capabilities and underestimated the degree of fatigue of the troops. | The operation conceived by the command of the 2nd Ukrainian Front to destroy the main forces of the entire southern enemy grouping was also unsuccessful. Marshal Konev had an impressive force at his disposal - 56 rifle and 3 cavalry divisions, 6 tank and 4 mechanized corps (377.5 thousand people, 326 tanks, 515 combat aircraft, 8,300 thousand guns and mortars). The enemy could oppose Konev's troops with only 24 divisions, including 5 tank and 2 motorized divisions (about 160 thousand people, more than 160 tanks, 600 combat aircraft and about 3,000 guns and mortars). "Starting from April 8, Marshal Konev made two attempts to break through the defenses of the German-Romanian troops and break through to the Prut, but without success. The enemy skillfully defended himself, guessing the plans of the Soviet command in time and effectively maneuvering the

lany. In early May, the offensive of the 2nd Ukrainian Front was stopped.

Liberation of the Crimea. The successful offensive of the Red Army in the spring of 1944 on the right-bank Ukraine buried the hope of the Wehrmacht command to break through the corridor to connect with units of the 17th Army defending the Crimea. The question of its evacuation from the peninsula was raised by the high command of the German army before Hitler in the autumn of 1943. But this time, too, the Fuhrer preferred political considerations to strategic expediency. In his opinion, the retention of the Crimea was one of the most important factors in the stability of the entire southern wing of the Eastern Front and the preservation of allies in the Balkans. "Abandonment of the Crimea," he declared, "would mean the withdrawal from us of Turkey, and then of Bulgaria and Romania." The consequence of this was not the evacuation, but the strengthening of the troops defending the Crimea.

The plan for the liberation of the Crimean peninsula was developed by the Soviet command in February 1944. He assumed.

Destroy the German 17th Army with simultaneous strikes

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book.Z. S. 47.

483

troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front from Perekop and Sivash and a separate Primorskaya Army from the Kerch bridgehead with the support of the Black Sea Fleet and Crimean partisans, preventing its evacuation by sea. The interaction of such heterogeneous forces was to be ensured by two representatives of the Headquarters - Marshals A.M. Vasilevsky and K.E. Voroshilov. |

The operation began on April 8 by storming the German fortifications on the Perekop Isthmus by troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front. The enemy's defense had to be literally gnawed through, and only on the fourth day was it broken through. This breakthrough and capture by the shock tank corps of Dzhankoy predetermined further success. The enemy, fearing to be cut off, began a quick retreat from Perekop and from the Kerch Peninsula. On April 12, the evacuation of the rear German services from Sevastopol began. Already on April 15-16, formations of the 4th Ukrainian Front and a separate Primorsky Army reached the outer defensive line of Sevastopol, blocking a 70,000-strong grouping of German and Romanian troops. The enemy, meanwhile, was preparing to repel the assault. Hitler canceled the evacuation that had begun, moreover, at his insistence, the Crimean group received replenishment - about 6 thousand soldiers and officers deployed by sea and air. Sevastopol was declared a "city-fortress", which had to be defended to the last soldier. This decision of Hitler also had political overtones - the breakthrough of the Red Army into the Crimea had a negative impact on the position of Turkey, and on April 20 it stopped the supply of chromium ore, which was sorely needed for Germany. "Given the general situation, the loss of Sevastopol'mo-

can be the last straw enough to overflow the thicket. Türkiye has already reacted sharply negatively to the withdrawal from the Crimea, Hitler said. - In the event of the surrender of Sevastopol, it may go to the enemy camp. This will have a strong impact on the Balkan countries and influence the position of the rest of the neutral states..." '.

The significance of the capture of Sevastopol was also understood by the Soviet leadership. Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky recalled: "I.V. Stalin

1 See: Great Patriotic... S. 48-49.

484

repeatedly reminded us of the need to hasten with the liquidation of the Crimean group of the enemy, and we ourselves personally understood the importance of this both from a military and political point of view ... But when it came to a new postponement of the offensive, the Supreme Commander lost his balance . The conversation took on a rather heated character. But I did not deviate from my ... "I An attempt to overcome the German defenses on the move and disrupt the evacuation in full swing failed. And one should pay tribute to Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky - at the risk of arousing the wrath of Stalin, unpredictable in its consequences, he nevertheless achieved his goal - the command of the 4th Ukrainian Front did not have to throw its troops into the unsuppressed enemy defenses, it received the necessary time to thoroughly prepare for the assault. Preparations for the last assault on the Sevastó field lasted 12 days. Right up until May 5, the heavy artillery of the front methodically destroyed the long-term fortifications of the enemy, while the troops, meanwhile, practiced the tactics of breaking through the fortified zones on mock-ups specially created in the rear.

On May 7, the general assault on Sevastopol began. The Soviet command managed to mislead the enemy. He mistook the distraction attack of the 2nd Guards Army from the north as the main direction of attack and transferred reserves there from the southern sector of defense, where the main attack was immediately delivered. By the end of May 10, the city was completely liberated. Remains

The Crimean group of about 30 thousand soldiers and officers retreated to Cape Khersones, where the fighting continued until May 12. All this time, the forces of the Black Sea Fleet - aviation, torpedo boats and submarines continued to strike at enemy ships that had evacuated troops. But they did not solve the task set by the Headquarters to disrupt the evacuation - from the more than 260,000-strong Crimean grouping, the enemy managed to evacuate by sea and by air more than half

US - 137 thousand soldiers and officers. According to German data, from 3 to

Vasilevsky A.M. Decree. op. pp. 11-112.



485

On May 13, 42 thousand people died at sea. 53,000 soldiers and officers found themselves in Soviet captivity.'

The liberation of the Crimea marked the end of the offensive operations of the Red Army on the southern flank of the Soviet-German front. The advance to the west reached 250-450 km. In general, the actions of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd Ukrainian and 2nd Belorussian fronts in March-April 1944 led to the liberation of the right-bank Ukraine and an exit for more than 400 km to the state border of the USSR. The fighting was launched on the territory of Germany's ally - Romania.

But still, the tasks set were not completely solved. The Soviet troops, despite their significant numerical superiority, failed, as planned, to destroy the enemy grouping on the southern flank of the front, although they were very close to this. In general, this offensive, this "battle in the mud" can be called a battle of missed opportunities. More than once, formations of the Red Army surrounded large enemy groupings, but not one of them was completely destroyed - the enemy constantly slipped out of the shrinking ring. The main reason for this was the repeated underestimation of the enemy, his ability to conduct active operations. The Soviet command got the impression that the German army was demoralized and its morale was broken. At the same time, when planning their own operations, really bold and large-scale ones, each time they allowed an inexplicable overestimation of their own capabilities, a misunderstanding of the entire degree of complexity of the process of preparing such large-scale operations, an elementary neglect of the organization of interaction between both neighboring fronts and the forces of one front. The institution of representatives of the Stavka, whose first task was precisely the organization of such interaction, did not save either. In a word, it was a clear period of "dizziness from success", and the Soviet generals and marshals still had to get rid of this.

The result of all the noted shortcomings in the command and control of the troops was the ratio of losses - one to three in favor of pro

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book.Z. S. 51.

486

tivnik. The total losses of the Red Army during the liberation of the right-bank Ukraine and the Crimea for the period December 1943 - May 1944 amounted to 1,194,347 people, of which 287,952 were irretrievable, the troops lost 4,837 tanks, 855 aircraft, 8,053 guns and mortars. During the same period, during the Soviet offensive in the right-bank Ukraine and in the Crimea, the Wehrmacht lost 99 divisions and 2 brigades, of which 22 divisions were destroyed, and 61 divisions lost up to half of their strength. The total losses of the German and Romanian troops amounted to

389 thousand people, including irrevocable - 93 thousand<sup>2</sup>.

## REVENGE IN BELARUS

In May 1944, a new operational pause arose practically along the entire length of the Soviet-German front - the forces of the Red Army were exhausted by the winter-spring offensive, which absorbed huge resources. The Wehrmacht also suffered heavy losses. But on the whole, the Soviet armed forces continued to maintain a general superiority over the enemy - 1.7 times in personnel, 1.8 times in the number of guns and mortars, 1.9 times in combat aircraft, 1.6 times — in tanks and self-propelled guns<sup>1</sup>.

The Supreme Commander-in-Chief set before the troops of the Red Army tasks for the summer-autumn campaign of 1944 - to complete the liberation of Soviet territory and withdraw Germany's European allies from the war. To this end, it was planned to carry out a series of strategic offensive operations throughout the entire space of the Soviet-German front, in turn defeating large enemy groupings in Karelia, in Belarus and in the western regions of Ukraine. In autumn, it was planned to continue the offensive in the Balkans and the Baltic. The opening of a second front in Europe - on June 6, the Allied landings in Normandy began - created favorable opportunities

<sup>1</sup> Calculated from: Russia and the USSR in the Wars of the 20th Century: A Statistical Study. — M.: OLMA-PRESS, 2001, S. 292,294, 486.

<sup>2</sup> See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 3. P. 51. <sup>3</sup> Ibid. S. 54.

487

necessary for the implementation of the Soviet plan. Now the command of the Wehrmacht is horrible. in the grip of a war on two fronts, the maneuver of forces was extremely limited. First of all, this concerned aviation, a significant part of which was transferred to the west to repel the invasion of France.

The main direction in the summer campaign was the western one. For some time, as a result of the advance of the Red Army during the spring offensive, a new "balcony" was formed, this time the Belorussian one. A ledge similar to Rzhev-Vyazemsky in 1942-1943. and Smolensky in 1943-1944, again hung over the flanks of the neighboring Soviet fronts, fettering their actions and covering the approaches to Poland and East Prussia. He also ensured the stability of the entire German defense in the Baltic and Western Ukraine. The ledge was of extreme importance also due to the developed network of railways and highways, linking the flanks of the entire German Eastern Front and allowing the Wehrmacht command to carry out a wide maneuver of forces. |

The Belorussian "balcony" was defended by the same Army Group "Center" under the command of Field Marshal E. Bush, who had accumulated vast experience in conducting a stubborn defense against the Red Army in this direction. It consisted of three field and one tank armies - a total of 50 divisions. German troops this time also managed to create a powerful defense system up to 250-270 km deep. The first frontier, prepared in the most detail, received the "personal" name "Panther". Everything possible was created there within the framework of the field defense - continuous trenches in two or three rows, connected by communications, wire fences, minefields and anti-tank ditches, all this was saturated with numerous pillboxes and bunkers, armored caps and prefabricated reinforced concrete firing points, dugouts with an overlap of five or six rolls. The nature of the terrain in this direction - wooded and swampy with numerous hills, hollows and swampy floodplains of rivers - was still more suitable for defense than for attack. It made it possible to perfectly mask positions and carry out covert maneuvering. Impossibility Massi

488

The forged use of tanks in a given area reduced the chances of a successful offensive to a minimum. And the very configuration of the front line directly suggested the advantage of a strike on the flanks of the Belorussian "balcony", as if showing the enemy the direction of the future offensive. Field Marshal E. Bush understood this and prepared in every possible way to repel blows from the flank, especially since he had no choice, since Hitler firmly rejected the proposal to withdraw Army Group Center from the ledge.

The plan of the offensive of the Red Army in the western direction received the code name "Bagration". He envisaged a simultaneous breakthrough of the enemy's defenses in several sectors with the aim of dismembering his grouping and destroying it piecemeal. After that, it was supposed to carry out a deep - up to 200-300 km - coverage of the main forces of Army Group Center and their destruction east of Minsk. This grandiose task had to be solved by the troops of four fronts - the 1st Baltic General of the Army I.Kh. Bagramyan, 3rd Belorussian General of the Army I.D. Chernyakhovsky, 2nd Belorussian Colonel General G.F. Zakharov, 1st Belarusian General of the Army K.K. Rokossovsky.

Supreme Commander after the unfortunate failures of the Western Front in 1942-1944. attached particular importance to the new operation - it was necessary to demonstrate the increased power of the Red Army in this direction as well. To this end, a whole "landing force" of representatives of the Stavka went to the fronts. The actions of the 1st Baltic and 3rd Belorussian fronts were coordinated by Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky, 1st and 2nd Belorussian Fronts Marshal G.K. Zhukov. Participation in the operation of the air force was provided by the commander of the Red Army Air Force, Chief Air Marshal A.A. Novikov. The use of artillery on the | 2nd Belorussian fronts is controlled

shaft head of the Main Artillery Directorate, General N.D. Yakovlev, on the 3rd Belorussian and 1st Baltic front Takh - the representative of the commander of the artillery of the Red Army, General M.N. Chistyakov. The troops of the Red Army had overwhelming superiority over the enemy.

489

RELATION OF FORCES OF THE SIDES IN OPERATION "BAGRATION".

Personnel, thousand people  
Tanks and self-propelled guns, units  
5200 900 Combat aircraft, units

Guns and mortars, units 36400 - 9500

The main feature of this operation was the terrain completely unsuitable for a large-scale offensive. The command of the Red Army decided to use this clearly unfavorable circumstance to its advantage. A gigantic complex of measures was carried out in order to convince the enemy that the main blow would be delivered in another direction - south of Polesie (Pripyat lowland). The strictest camouflage measures were observed. The regrouping of troops was carried out only at night and in small groups, making fires was not allowed. In order to misinform the enemy on the directions of future strikes, units of the Red Army carried out intensive construction of three defensive lines up to 40 km deep. The troops defiantly prepared for defense. All this time, the main striking forces of Bagration - the 5th Guards and 2nd Tank Armies, until the very beginning of the offensive, were on the southern wing of the Soviet-German front. For the same purpose, in the south, in the zone of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, a false grouping was created consisting of 9 rifle divisions, reinforced with tanks and artillery. The area of their deployment was abundantly saturated with models of tanks, guns and was heavily patrolled by fighters. All these measures achieved their goal - until the very beginning of the offensive in Belarus, the Wehrmacht command remained confident that the main blow would be struck in Ukraine in building on the success of the Korsun-Shevchenko operation. Therefore, 24 German tank and mechanized divisions of the 34 available remained in the areas south of Polissya. suddenly

1 See: History of the Second World War, 1939-1945. T. 9. M.: Military Publishing House, 1978. p. 47.

490

the validity of the operation was ensured. It remained to prepare the howl of the implementation.

And on this issue, the Soviet command during the preparation of the summer offensive of 1944 showed that it was able to draw certain lessons from the hardest battles of 1941-1943. It was necessary to take revenge for all the failures in the western direction. There was another very symbolic circumstance - the Soviet troops had to act in the same places where in the summer of 1941 the Wehrmacht won one of its first victories on the Eastern Front, defeating the main forces of the Western Front.

Not a single Soviet offensive was prepared with such care. The main drawback of the formations of the Red Army - the weak interaction of the combat arms on the battlefield - was eliminated in the most scrupulous way, the experience gained was carefully studied. Units learned to advance through the Pripyat

lot.

From the memoirs of Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky:

"It was not an easy task for the national soldiers and officers to pass through these disastrous places, to pass with battles, to pass swiftly. People prepared themselves for this feat. The infantrymen, not far from the front line, learned to swim, to overcome swamps and rivers on improvised means, and to navigate in the forest. A lot of wet walking shoes were made - swamp shoes, drags for machine guns, mortars and light artillery, boats and rafts were made. Tankers have their own training. I remember how General Batov [commander of the 65th Army] showed me a "tank-drome" in a swamp in the rear of the army. For an hour and a half we watched as car after car climbed into the swamp and overcame it. Together with the sappers, the tankers supplied each tank with fascists, logs and special triangles for passing through wide ditches.

The work of all types of intelligence - military, air and intelligence, was unusually thorough, revealing the structure of the German defense, the composition of the enemy forces. And here

' Rokossovsky K.K. Decree. op. S. 316.

491.

partisans and underground fighters provided invaluable assistance. The command of the Red Army received from them information about the location of 33 enemy headquarters, 30 airfields, 70 large warehouses, the composition of 900 garrisons and about 240 units. On the directions of the future offensive, the partisans identified possible fords across the Western Dvina, took into account all the existing bridges. The wide involvement of partisans in the operation "Bagration" became another feature of it. By that time, 143 thousand partisans were operating on Belarusian soil, which were part of 150 partisan brigades and 49 separate detachments. This impressive army, in addition to conducting reconnaissance, was preparing for active actions behind enemy lines - disrupting communications, destroying communications centers, headquarters, capturing and holding

advantageous lines of defense and bridgeheads on the rivers before the approach of the army.

On June 22, on the third anniversary of the start of the war, the troops of the Soviet fronts launched Operation Bagration. On June 23-24, the main forces of the 1st Baltic and three Belorussian fronts went over to the offensive. It began with unprecedented artillery preparation - 30,000 guns and mortars crushed the German defenses for two hours. Frontal and long-range aviation made over 1,000 sorties. Most of the German defenses were destroyed or put out of action, artillery and mortar batteries were suppressed, command and control of troops was disrupted. A strike of such hurricane force, it seemed, was supposed to completely crush the enemy's defenses and demoralize his troops. However, the Wehrmacht once again demonstrated the highest fighting spirit and the ability to organize counterattacks in the most difficult conditions. Already in the first hours of the offensive to the site of the Soviet breakthrough, the German command managed to transfer reserves. But the Soviet command also showed that it was already quite capable of competing with the German generals in their favorite form of action - maneuver. Strike groups were immediately transferred to the directions where the success of a breakthrough was indicated, breaking through the enemy defenses. The troops of the 1st Baltic Front on the very first day broke through the German defenses north

492

beyond Vitebsk and on the night of June 24 they reached the Western Dvina, crossing it on the move and deeply enveloping the entire Vitebsk grouping. The enemy in this direction was clearly taken by surprise. The actions of the 3rd Belorussian Front turned out to be successful; on the second day of the offensive, its formations captured the important communications center of the city of Bogushevsk. The troops of the 2nd Belorussian Front, having broken the resistance of the enemy, on the second day entered the operational space and began pursuing the retreating German formations. 1st Belorussian Front General K.K. Rokossovsky occupied the longest section (almost 900 km), covering the entire Polesie region from the south, the most difficult for an offensive. But the large-scale training of troops affected from the very beginning of the operation. By the end of the third day, the front was joined by Kr. Berezina south of Bobruisk and almost simultaneously - north of the city, closing the encirclement. Taken together, this meant that the front of Army Group Center was torn in several places. The crisis has come. The German command, not having enough reserves, had to determine the priority directions of counterattacks in order to stop the offensive of the Red Army and withdraw its troops from the threat of complete defeat. But the Soviet command was not going to give the enemy this opportunity. Mobile groups of fronts—tank corps, the 5th Guards Tank Army, and cavalry-mechanized groups—were immediately introduced into the gaps that had formed. Their actions were covered and provided by front-line aviation. Reconnaissance aircraft ensured the advance of tankers and horsemen, bombers disrupted the transfer of German reserves, attack aircraft paved the way forward. All this car-

The mud to the smallest detail resembled the events of the summer of 1941, but now the Red Army was smashing the Wehrmacht divisions, confidently encircling two enemy groups at once - near Vitebsk and Bobruisk. In the first "boiler" were five infantry divisions of the 3rd Panzer Army with a total of 35 thousand people. Opponents this time retained full control of the troops in the encirclement and tried to break through the ring with a powerful blow. However, this time the actions of the Soviet command turned out to be without

493

Precise - powerful air strikes and the brutal defense of the infantry, this attempt was repulsed. On June 27, the Vitebsk grouping was destroyed, the enemy's losses amounted to up to 20,000 killed and more than 10,000 captured.' By this time, the troops of the 2nd Belorussian Front had liberated Mogilev, about 3400 prisoners were captured, the enemy lost more than 6 thousand soldiers and officers killed, a large amount of military equipment. The troops of the 1st Belorussian Front also successfully operated during the encirclement and liquidation of the German group near Bobruisk. The tank corps introduced into the breach acted classically - bypassing pockets of resistance and not getting involved in protracted battles, by the end of June 26 they bypassed the city and intercepted the retreat routes. Six divisions of the 9th German Army turned out to be surrounded - about 40 thousand soldiers and officers. The German command, quickly orienting itself, organized an operation to break through the encirclement. But the Soviet air reconnaissance discovered in time the concentration of infantry and equipment in the area of the breakthrough in the direction of the city of Zhlobin. Against. of the enemy columns breaking through, strike aircraft were thrown. Marshal G.K., who was watching her actions. Zhukov recalled: "Hundreds of bombers of the 16th Army of S.I. Rudenko, interacting with the 48th Army, delivered blow after blow against the enemy group. Strong fires broke out on the battlefield: cars, tanks, stocks of fuels and lubricants were burning. The whole field was lit up with an ominous fire. Focusing on it, more and more echelons of our bombers approached, dropping bombs of various calibers. All this terrible "choir" was supplemented by artillery fire of the 48th Army. The German soldiers, as if mad, rushed in all directions, and those who did not want to surrender were immediately killed. This raid actually dispersed the German troops and made an organized breakthrough impossible. Rifle formations of the 65th Army completed the rout. In total, in the battles near Bobruisk during the offensive and encirclement, about 74 thousand enemy soldiers and officers were destroyed and captured. Defeat under Bob

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 3. P. 63. 2 Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. S. 142.

494

Ruisky was swift and crushing. In terms of the level of interaction between troops on the battlefield, the effectiveness of command and control

The actions of the command and troops of the 1st Belorussian Front turned out to be beyond praise, the speed and accuracy of the decisions made. In comparison with the recent painful failures of the troops of the Western Front, General V.D. Sokolovsky, these victories looked especially impressive. For the brilliant conduct of the Vitebsk operation, the newly appointed commander of the 3rd Belorussian Front, Colonel General I.D. Chernyakhovsky was awarded the rank of army general. For the defeat of the enemy near Bobruisk, the commander of the 1st Belorussian Front, General of the Army K.K. Rokossovsky was awarded the title of Marshal of the Soviet Union.

As a result of these two operations, the front of the Army Group "Center" was torn apart in a huge area with a length of 520 km. The road to Minsk was opened for the Red Army. The surviving German formations hurriedly retreated under the blows of Soviet troops and Belarusian partisans.

From the memoirs of an officer of the 36th Infantry Division of the Wehrmacht:

"The Russians managed to surround the 9th Army in the Bobruisk area. An order was given to break through, which we succeeded at first... But the Russians created several encirclements, and we fell from one encirclement into another... As a result of this, all general confusion was created. Not infrequently German colonels and lieutenant colonels tore off their epaulettes, threw away their caps, and remained to wait for the Russians. General panic reigned... It was a catastrophe that I had never experienced. At the division headquarters, everyone was at a loss, there was no communication with the corps headquarters. No one knew the real situation, there were no maps ... The soldiers now lost all confidence in the officers.

The troops of the three fronts continued their offensive almost without interruption, covering the flanks of the German 4th Army, which was retreating to Minsk. Trying to save the remnants of the Army Group Center, Hitler sent the best Wehrmacht defense specialist, Field Marshal V. Model, to Belarus. to the most experienced

'  
Cit. Quoted from: History of the Second World War, 1939-1945. T.9. S. 52.

495

The commander really managed to organize the defense east of Minsk. All possible reserves were transferred here from all sectors, including rear teams and police units.

By June 29, the Soviet Headquarters set the task for the fronts to reach Minsk and encircle the German troops retreating from Mogilev to the river. Berezina: The success of the new task now depended entirely on the speed of movement of Red Army formations in order to prevent the enemy from gaining a foothold on pre-equipped defensive lines. In this situation, the commanders of the armies introduced shock mobile detachments into the breakthrough to capture roads, bridges and river crossings, their actions provided



the aviation of the fronts was saddened. The actions of the tankers were especially effective. On the night of July 2, a brigade of the 2nd Guards Tank Corps, having outstripped the units of the retreating Germans by more than 100 km, entered the highway and at 3 o'clock in the morning broke into the northeastern outskirts of Minsk. And soon forward detachments of the 5th Guards Tank Army appeared there, by noon, tanks of the 1st Guards Tank Corps entered the city from the south. By evening, the capital of Belarus was liberated. The city was captured almost on the move, without a long siege. To the east of Minsk, the main forces of the 4th German Army were surrounded - about 105 thousand soldiers and officers. The operation to eliminate it was carried out in the period from 5 to 11 July. Here Soviet aviation also played a decisive role, its massive use had a demoralizing effect on the encircled grouping. In the end, about 35 thousand soldiers and officers of the Wehrmacht surrendered, including - 12 generals, including the acting commander of the 4th Army, General V. Muller. The rest - about 70 thousand - was destroyed. On July 17, over 57 thousand German soldiers and officers captured in Belarus passed through the streets of Moscow under escort. The procession was led by 19 Wehrmacht generals.

In the Minsk encirclement operation, a new style of Soviet command appeared, the basis of which was the highest

496

the mobility of troops. It is precisely because of this that the gap between the inner and outer encirclement, which at first was only 50 km, increased to 150 km after a few days, which made a breakthrough of the encircled grouping, even in small groups, completely impossible.

,

From the memoirs of a German officer G. Biedermann:

"The collapse of Army Group Center in June and July led to chaos. This was clearly manifested in the way on the roads and bridges there were countless units running to the rear, seemingly without command and control, while other weakened units sought to break through these crowds in the direction of the front to join the battle with an attacking enemy. Some broken formations succumbed to panic: and rushed west on foot and in vehicles of all kinds. Confusion, panic-stricken soldiers, blockades and obstruction of all traffic on passable roads would have been considered unthinkable things before, but the collapse of discipline and order has become a reality.

The Russians were able to increase the confusion and confusion by carrying out constant air raids, in which aircraft bombed and shot everyone on dirt roads and railways, as a result of which the broken, demoralized remnants of the once proud regiments scatter in different directions on their way. Strategic reserves could not break through this chaos to the front and remained shackled in a hodgepodge

cars and people. It became impossible to move entire units. And the highest commander, on whose conscience this catastrophe should be attributed, was not here to see what his decisions had brought him to. As always, the main burden of these mistakes fell on the shoulders of the soldiers at the front, who paid for it with their lives.

' Bidermon G. In mortal combat. Memoirs of an anti-tank crew commander. 1941-1945 / Transl. English A.S. Tsypchenkova. - M.: ZAO Tsentrpoligraf, 2005. S. 240.

497

The result of the defeat of the enemy during Operation Bagration was the formation of a colossal 400-kilometer gap in the center of the strategic front, into which the troops of three Soviet fronts rushed. The threat of a devastating disaster hung over the Wehrmacht. Trying to somehow strengthen the front, which was bursting at all seams, the German command began the transfer of reserves from Europe - 46 divisions and 4 brigades from Germany and the occupied European countries were sent to the east. From now on, the German generals themselves found themselves in the situation of "owners of Trishkin's caftan" - there were not enough reserves in any of the directions. The same reserves that could be transferred towards the advancing units of the Red Army, already on the way to the front, fell under the blows of partisans and front-line aviation. As a result, they were introduced into battle separately and could not stop the ongoing offensive of the Red Army.

## TRIP TO EUROPE

Having torn apart the front of the Army Group "Center" and without giving the enemy a break, the Soviet troops rushed to the west. At the end of July, the armies of the right wing of the 1st Belorussian Front surrounded and liquidated another German group near Brest - four infantry divisions, completing the liberation of the territory of Belarus. In the second half of August 1944, the troops of the left flank of the 1st Belorussian Front reached the Soviet-Polish border. July 24 units: 2nd Panzer Army General S.I. Bogdanov and the 8th Guards Army General V.I. Chuikov liberated the large city of Poland - Lublin. On July 27, the troops of the front crossed the Vistula and captured bridgeheads on its left bank. On July 31, the 2nd Panzer Army broke through to the suburbs of Warsaw - Prague, but was stopped by powerful enemy reserves. Soviet tankers were forced to engage in heavy defensive battles. It was not possible to break into Warsaw on the move. In the meantime, an armed uprising had already begun in the capital of Poland. It was organized and started according to the plan approved by the government in exile.

498

S. Mikolajczyk in London. Units of the Polish Home Army (AK) under the command of General T. Bur-Komarovsky penetrated into the city in advance and at the moment of the approach of the advanced units of the Red Army raised an uprising and captured the Polish capital. The purpose of the speech was to seize control of Warsaw and establish the political power of the supporters of the émigré government in the liberated territory of Poland. But by that time in the liberated city of Chelm, on July 21, 1944, the first authority in Poland was created - the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKNO), headed by E. Osobka-Morawski. On the same day, the Polish Army was created under the command of General M. Rola-Zhymerski. Thus, from the very beginning, the outcome of the uprising in Warsaw and its liberation by the Red Army acquired acute political significance. In fact, the question of who will have control in post-war Poland - the pro-Western government of Mikolajczyk or the pro-Soviet

forces.

The uprising in Warsaw began on August 1, but the command of the Red Army learned about it only the next day from intelligence reports. On August 9, Stalin received Mikolajczyk, who asked to help the rebels, but, above all, with weapons and ammunition. The Soviet leader expressed doubts about the effectiveness of such assistance, but added: "We will do everything in our power to help Warsaw"! Meanwhile, after the first successes of the uprising, the situation in Warsaw changed. Having recovered from the unexpected attack, the German garrison went on to active operations, using artillery, tanks, and aircraft. The rebels, numbering about 25,000-35,000, had mostly only small arms, but they were in short supply. The rebels failed to hold the key objects of the capital, and soon the German troops began to push them to the city center. On August 12, General T. Bur-Komarovsky once again turned to the government in exile in London, urging them to urgently send weapons

and land troops in Warsaw. But the British refused you

1 Cited. In: The Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book.Z. pp. 73-74.

499

landing throws. In return, Allied aviation dropped several tens of tons of weapons, ammunition and food to the rebels. The request of the allied command for shuttle raids of bombers on Warsaw with their subsequent landing on Soviet airfields was rejected by Stalin, who reproached the allies for not informing them in time about the impending uprising. In a message to W. Churchill, Stalin wrote: "... Having become more familiar with the Warsaw case, I became convinced that the Warsaw action is a reckless, terrible adventure, costing the population great sacrifices." Therefore, Stalin wrote further, the Soviet command came to the conclusion that it was necessary to dissociate itself from it.

In early September 1944, the troops of the 1st Belorussian Front. launched an offensive against Warsaw and, after a fierce five-day battle, captured the city and fortress of Prague, a suburb of the Polish capital. On the night of September 16, the 1st Polish division named after Kosciuszko, operating as part of the Red Army, captured a bridgehead on the left bank of the Vistula within Warsaw. But they failed to connect with the rebels. The captured bridgehead had to be abandoned. On September 18, after the consent of the Soviet government for a shuttle raid, 104 American heavy bombers dropped more than 1,200 containers with cargo by parachute in the areas of the uprising. But the rebels got only a few dozen. A large amount of weapons and ammunition, as well as medicines and food was delivered to Warsaw by Soviet aircraft. But the main thing - to break into the city with a frontal attack - the troops of the Red Army could not, a long and serious preparation for the assault was necessary, but there was no time. Attempts to break into the city on the move led only to heavy losses. The resistance of the rebels gradually weakened, and on October 2, 1944, after 63 days, they capitulated, 1.5 thousand resistance fighters surrendered. During the fighting, 22,000 insurgents, 5,600 soldiers of the Polish Army and 180,000 inhabitants were killed. The troops of the Red Army on the outskirts of Warsaw in August - September 1944 lost a total of 235 thousand people killed, wounded, missing. Polish connections in co

500

the staff of the Red Army lost 11 thousand people. German losses during the suppression of the uprising amounted to 17,000 killed and missing and 9,000 wounded.' ,

The Byelorussian strategic offensive operation ended with the withdrawal of the Red Army to Warsaw. It became one of the most brilliant operations of the Great Patriotic War, in which for the first time on such a scale the best features of the Soviet military leadership school were manifested - the courage and scale of the plan, the achievement of complete surprise, the speed of action. The Soviet command fully succeeded in realizing the idea of breaking and collapsing the enemy's front by inflicting a series of powerful simultaneous strikes on a front of several hundred kilometers. It has already been noted above that attempts were made to implement a similar plan before, during the winter offensive of 1942 and 1943. But then these attempts turned into heavy defeats and losses. The main reason was the weakness and inexperience of the Soviet commanders, the inability to correlate their plan with the real capabilities of the troops, the inability to organize and conduct a thorough preparation of the offensive, and a gross underestimation of the enemy. As a rule, it was not possible to ensure the secrecy of the preparation and the suddenness of the start of the offensive. And, most importantly, already in the course of the operations themselves, the enemy always outperformed the troops of the Red Army in maneuver.

The decisive factor in the success of the operation "Bagration" was the increased level of military leadership skills of the Red Army command. By that time, a whole galaxy of really outstanding commanders had managed to form - the commander

corps, armies, fronts. Generals I.D. Chernyakhovsky and K.K. Rokossovsky demonstrated the highest level of command and control in a rapidly changing environment, constantly outperforming the enemy in decision making and outmaneuvering him. It is also indicative that General Field Marshal Walter Model, who became famous for his effective defense of the Rzhev-Vyazemsky "ledge" in 1942, could not oppose anything to the powerful and fast blows of Ro-

`Kossovsky and Chernyakhovsky. Mr.

1 Great Patriotic War ... S. 76.

501

Soviet aviation in the air, captured already at the very beginning of the offensive. (This was largely facilitated by the transfer of a large part of German aviation to the west to repel the Allied landings and offensives.) Constant and effective reconnaissance, air support for the advancing Soviet troops, massive strikes against advancing German reserves finally gave the Red Army that advantage a company that she had not had since the beginning of the war. The saturation of the Soviet troops with equipment played a colossal role. A huge number of American off-road vehicles - Studebaker, Dodge, Chevrolet - allowed Soviet motorized rifle formations to perform deep enveloping maneuvers off paved roads, not lagging behind.

,  
wai from shock tank groups.

Truly revolutionary were the changes in the provision of troops with communications. Telephone communications and messengers have finally been replaced, although not yet completely, by numerous radio stations. Moreover, a significant part of them were put on the chassis of the same American all-terrain vehicles, the commanders of the formations finally received permanent and mobile communications, which in turn allowed them to confidently control the actions of mobile groups in the depths of enemy defenses. And Lend-Lease supplies played a decisive role in these revolutionary changes. During the war years, the USSR received from the Allies 35,800 radio stations, 5,899 receivers, 245,000 telephone sets and 348 locators, which provided the basic needs of the Red Army, 1.7 million kilometers of field telephone cable.

But still, the decisive prerequisite and condition for the success of the offensive of the Red Army in Belarus was the conquest of superiority in the air. This became possible thanks not only to the numerical but also to the qualitative growth of Soviet aviation. And here the improvement of communication led to a cardinal revolution. Soviet aviation met the war practically unradiated. Thus, frontal aviation divisions actually did not have radio communications on aircraft, and often on

1 See: Beshanov V. Decree. op. S. 448.

502

command posts. In the conditions of a real battle, this meant the beginning that the squadrons that took off were no longer controlled from the ground and could not interact with ground forces. In the event of a change in the situation in the target area, which was the rule in the conditions of the rapid advance of the German troops, the commander

frames of squadrons and groups themselves had to determine the target, and the feasibility of acting on it. In the air, the main means of flight and squadron control were the traditional wing flapping techniques and the invariable command "do as I do". It is quite clear that the POSSIBILITY of this "communication" was limited only by the limit of visibility, but with the beginning of the battle it became impossible. In German aviation, the attitude to communications was initially different. The radio station on the plane was considered no less necessary than the armament. Excellent, stable communication turned the Luftwaffe into an indispensable tool for blitzkrieg. German aviation not only opened an impenetrable "umbrella" over the tank wedges that tore apart the defenses of the Red Army in 1941, but also turned out to be a powerful hammer that crushed defense units and destroyed suitable reserves, thus clearing the way for the tank groups of Hoth, Guderian, Hoepner and Kleist. The air controllers located in the forward units ensured the immediate call and guidance of the famous Yu-87 "Shtuka" dive bombers, capable of inflicting really pinpoint strikes on artillery batteries, bridges, headquarters, up to individual KOV tanks. Not a single army of that time could boast of such a level of interaction between aviation and ground forces. It took the Red Army three years to organize such cooperation. Only in 1942 did the first radio-equipped fighter regiment appear in Soviet aviation, in which only a third of the machines had transceivers and half only receivers, but even these modest innovations were considered a great achievement. At the same time, the first attempt was made to direct fighters from a ground point, but it turned out to be unsuccessful due to the complete inability of the pilots to use communications. A year later in aviation

503

The Red Army already had fully radio-equipped fighter corps, and by 1944 the process of radio-firing aviation formations was practically completed.

From the memoirs of Colonel E.V. Koyander:

"The offensive in the Byelorussian operation, as you know, developed rapidly. Under these conditions, the greatest load in the management of aviation fell on the radio. The air officers, who were in the ground armies and mobile troops, kept in continuous communication with the leading groups of bombers and

attack aircraft. ...

As now, I remember the incident that occurred near Mariampole. On that day, Major I.D. Kapustin directed attack aircraft from a small trench at more and more new targets. Next to him was the head of the radio station, foreman I.F. Kozlov. The tanks seemed suspicious to him, advancing along the highway and firing in an easterly direction. The foreman raised binoculars to his eyes and clearly saw not German crosses on the cars. Before them, from the trench, there were probably no more than 700 - 800 meters.

- Comrade Major, fascists! shouted Kozlov. Kapustin, with a cursory glance at the approaching tanks, immediately ordered nine "silts" approaching under him to hit them.

"You see," he said calmly to the host, "the bastards broke through. Give them good. And then they do something like this here ...

Of the 25 vehicles, the "silts" destroyed 15, the rest, rolling back, came under fire from armor-piercers. "Flashed" two more tanks. Only eight enemy vehicles managed to escape from the inferno."

During the summer offensive in Belarus, Soviet aviation generals confidently did what even a year ago seemed completely impossible - they concentrated hundreds of aircraft to strike individual targets, and, if necessary, retargeted them directly in the air and into

1 Koyander E.V. I am "Rubin", I order ... - M.: Military Publishing House, 1978. S. 199, 201.

504

in general, they deployed over the head of the Soviet ground forces on a reliable aviation shield. Now the German soldiers had to constantly peer into the sky in anticipation of a new attack from the air, asking the bewildered question: "Where are our fighters?" Now the German command had to puzzle over how to ensure the transfer of reserves, avoiding their destruction from the air.

Another difference of the Belarusian offensive operation was the large-scale and close interaction of army units with partisan detachments. The partisans solved a number of the most important tasks of destroying the enemy's lines of communication and supplying the advancing troops of the Red Army. In total, in the course of Operation Bagration, partisan units 'destroyed over 15,000 and captured about 17,000 enemy soldiers and officers'.

The Byelorussian operation was distinguished by its gigantic spatial scope - the formations of four fronts advanced 550-600 km in 68 days, completing the liberation of Belorussia.

Russia and reaching the borders of Poland and Germany. The width of the offensive front during this time increased from 700 to 1100 km. The Wehrmacht suffered one of its most crushing defeats on the Eastern Front - 17 divisions and 3 brigades were completely destroyed, 50 divisions lost more than half of their combat strength. Enemy losses amounted to 409.4 thousand soldiers and officers, of which 255.4 thousand were irretrievable. The offensive of the Red Army in Belarus forced the German high command to transfer its reserves to the east, which greatly contributed to the success of the Allied landings in Normandy.

However, this time the success of the grandiose offensive was paid for with a lot of blood. During the offensive, the troops of the four fronts lost a total of 765,815 soldiers and officers, which amounted to 48.8% of their total strength by the beginning of the operation, irretrievable losses amounted to 178,507 people. During the two months of the offensive, 2,957 tanks and self-propelled guns, 2,447 guns and mortars, 822 combat aircraft were lost?

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book Z3. P.77. ? See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 296, 486.

505

End of blockade. The actions of the Red Army in the North-Western strategic direction were determined by the plan of the Leningrad-Novgorod strategic offensive operation, developed at the end of 1943. Troops of three fronts - Leningrad (commander - Army General L.A. Govorov), Volkhovsky (commander - General Army K.A. Meretskov) and the 2nd Baltic (commander - General of the Army M.M. Popov), which included 7 general skin, 3 shock and 3 air armies, together with the Baltic Fleet, long-range aviation under with the assistance of the partisan detachments, they were supposed to consistently defeat the 18th and 16th German armies from the Army Group North. This was supposed to lead to the liberation of the entire Leningrad region and access to the Baltic. By all indicators, the balance of power was in favor of the Soviet troops.

CORRELATION OF FORCES AND  
EQUIPMENT IN THE LENINGRAD-NOVGOROD OPERATION!

Soviet. | German troops troops

Personnel, thousand people 1252

Tanks and self-propelled guns, pcs. 1580

Aircraft aircraft, pcs.



balance of power

3.7:1

2.0:1

Guns and mortars, pcs.

But even with such a balance of forces, the task assigned to the Soviet troops was very difficult. The enemy was in his positions for more than two years and managed to create an extremely powerful defense - the so-called "Northern Wall" - a system of strongholds and centers of resistance, saturated with a large number of fire weapons, hidden in reinforced concrete and armored fortifications, covered with mines and explosives. wire barriers, blockages with a total depth of over 230 km. The experience of previous unsuccessful operations to break the blockade allowed the German command

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book Z3. P.22.

506

to identify the probable directions of the Soviet attack, to work out the most effective tactics for repelling the offensive, to improve their defensive structures. The commander of the Army Group "North", General G. Kühler, received an order from the high command to defend the positions occupied to the end.

But the command of the Red Army also learned lessons from its own experience, bought at an extremely expensive price. Instead of the previously practiced frontal attacks, the troops were tasked with making bypass and enveloping strikes. The troops of the Leningrad Front were to encircle the German 18th Army together with the troops of the Volkhov Front in two simultaneous powerful strikes - from the Oranienbaum bridgehead by the forces of the 2nd Shock Army and the forces of the 42nd Army from the Pulkovo Heights area. Front Commander General L.A. Govorov planned in this way to immediately crack the northern flank of the front of Army Group North. The action plan of the Volkhov Front also provided for a deep detour maneuver in order to envelop German troops in the Novy Gorod area. The 2nd Baltic Front was supposed to support the actions of its northern neighbors, holding down the main forces of the 16th German Army, preventing it from transferring its reserves to Leningrad and Novgorod. -

The experience of previous operations near Leningrad has shown that the weakest link in the actions of the Red Army troops is the coordination of the interaction of formations of different fronts with each other, as well as their interaction with the fleet, aviation, tanks and artillery. This time, the actions of the troops were coordinated in terms of tasks, lines and time. Mutually

the actions of the fronts with partisan detachments were coordinated by task forces created especially for this purpose, located under the Military Councils of the fronts. Particular attention was paid to measures to misinform the enemy about the directions of the main attacks and to achieve the surprise of the operation. |

But still, despite such a long and thorough preparation, the start of the offensive was unsuccessful. In the morning

507

On January 12, the 2nd Baltic Front was the first to start it, but the formations of the 10th Guards Army were able to advance only 2-3 km, losing up to 9,000 soldiers and officers, spending combat supplies and eventually stopping the offensive. The reason for this was the mistakes and mistakes in command and control of the troops on the part of the commander and his chief of staff.

On January 14-15, the offensive of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts began. And here the battles were extremely stubborn. Despite the Soviet artillery barrage, unprecedented in its power, and massive air bombardments, the enemy put up fierce and well-organized resistance. To break through the defenses, the commanders of the armies of both fronts had to bring into battle their second echelons and tank strike groups, which were originally intended for action in a breakthrough. On January 16-17, the enemy's defense was finally broken through, and his retreat began from the Mginsky ledge, the very one that the Red Army troops unsuccessfully tried to cut off during the offensives of 1941-1943.

But soon the offensive of both the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts slowed down. Both commanders were dissatisfied with their troops. General Govorov believed that "the troops of the armies are slowly developing a breakthrough and do not fulfill their tasks on time", the reason for this, in his opinion, was the lack of a clearly defined direction of the main attack, without proper maneuver by forces and means. Govorov demanded that the commanders of the armies abandon linear tactics and, finally, switch to the tactics of "maneuvering the shock and firing fist in the most important direction, curtailing and destroying the rest of the enemy's defenses by strikes on the flanks from the rear". In other words, if the front command was striving for a broad and bold maneuver, then the commanders of the armies and corps still preferred the same "tried" linear tactics of frontal strikes.

By the end of January, the actions of the troops had acquired a more maneuverable and decisive character. On January 30, formations of the 42nd and 2nd shock armies of the Leningrad Front reached the river. Meadows, coverage-

<sup>1</sup> See: Great Patriotic... S. 26.

508

from the north, the forces of the 18th German army. By that time, the troops of the Volkhov Front, having broken through the enemy defenses south of Novy Gorod, also began to advance behind enemy lines. Particularly successful were the actions of the formations of the 59th Army, which, quite unexpectedly for the enemy, crossed the weak trough of Lake Ilmen. As a result, the prospect of deep coverage from the north and south of the bulk of the troops of the entire Army Group North was outlined. But here the German command once again demonstrated its ability to quickly respond to threatening changes in the situation with a quick maneuver. Aviation was immediately thrown against the forces of the 59th Army, bombing the Ilmen ice and disrupting the crossing of heavy equipment, the troops were left without its support. Tanks and assault guns were thrown against the forces that had seized the bridgehead. As a result, the offensive bogged down. The command of the Volkhov Front clearly failed to assess in time the prospects for success and to provide for the operations of the troops crossing the Ilmen, primarily with aircraft and artillery. The result of this miscalculation was the transfer of the main efforts of the front to the north of Novgorod.

The commander of the Volkhov Front, General K.A. Meretskov had reason to be dissatisfied. "The operation is developing extremely slowly," he noted in his order of January 17. "The main drawback of this lies in poor management: as a rule, the army command has information about the combat operations of the corps once a day, and therefore cannot influence the situation in a timely manner and provide timely assistance in those areas where it is extremely needed!" . Novgorod was liberated on January 20. The eyes of his liberators were presented with a picture of horrific destruction. "Dead silence reigned in the streets," General K.A. Meretskov. Heaps of broken bricks were piled up everywhere. About forty buildings remained intact throughout the city. The greatest monuments of antiquity, the pride and adornment of ancient Russian architecture were blown up."

The enemy, under cover of the rearguards, hastily withdrew

1 See: Great Patriotic...  
? There. P.27.

509

their forces from the Mginsky, Luban and Chudovsky directions. The withdrawal was not easy, as the German troops were withdrawing from the ledge up to 120 km deep, when the shock groups of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts had already undercut its base. But this problem was nevertheless solved, which, however, did not save General G. Küchler from being dismissed. He was replaced by the proven "master of defense" General V. Model. At this time, the Soviet troops had already left Kr. Luga - a powerful natural frontier, which was turned by the enemy into a new line of defense, which was a complete surprise for Soviet front-line intelligence. It was not possible to overcome it on the move. By the beginning of March

that Leningrad-Novgorod operation ended. The troops of the Red Army advanced 220-280 km. The blockade of Leningrad was completely lifted, and the Leningrad and Novgorod regions were almost completely liberated. The losses of the Soviet troops amounted to 313,953 soldiers and officers, of which 76,686 people were irretrievable. During the offensive, the troops lost 462 tanks, 260 aircraft, 1,832 guns and mortars.

Breakthrough to the Baltic. The exit of the Red Army to the Luga line created the threat of a breakthrough into the Baltic states. For Germany, this was fraught with the loss of supplies of non-ferrous metal ores from Finland and Sweden, which meant a crisis in the entire military industry. The command of the Wehrmacht took a number of urgent measures to strengthen the army group "North", reinforcements were urgently sent to its composition, every opportunity was used. Among them were the newly formed two Estonian and two Latvian divisions and a number of police formations. As a result, the composition of the army group was increased to 47 divisions and one brigade.

The offensive of the Red Army in the Baltic States began in July 1944. By that time, the Wehrmacht formations, defeated in Belarus, were quickly retreating to the west, opening up the flank of Army Group North to attack. The Soviet Headquarters decided to take advantage of this circumstance. Before the troops of Leningrad (commander - General L.A. Govorov), 1st Baltic

1 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 293, 486.

510

of the 2nd Baltic (commander - General of the Army I.Kh. Bagramyan), 2nd Baltic (commander - General A.I. Eremenko) and 3rd Baltic (commander - General I.I. Maslennikov) fronts with the assistance of the troops of the 3rd The Belorussian Front (commanded by General of the Army I.D. Chernyakhovsky) was tasked with cutting off the entire Army Group North from the main forces, pressing it against the coast and destroying it, completing the liberation of the Baltic republics.

The 3rd Belorussian Front was the first to launch the offensive. The 5th army of General N.I. Krylov and the 5th Guards Tank Army of Marshal of the Armored Forces P.A. On July 5, Mistrov's mouth broke through the enemy's defenses with a swift blow and captured Vilnius from the north and south. On July 6, their advanced formations fought in the suburbs of the Lithuanian capital. On July 9, the city was completely blocked. Surrounded by a German garrison of over 12,000 soldiers and officers, they rejected the ultimatum to surrender and preferred to follow Hitler's order to "hold on to the last soldier." On July 14, Vilnius was liberated, over 5,200 enemy soldiers and officers were captured. Chernyakhovsky received a new task from the Headquarters - to capture Kaunas and move towards the borders of East Prussia. The successful advance of the troops of the 3rd Belorussian Front created the threat of cutting off the entire Army Group North, so

meeting the strike groups of the 3rd Belorussian, all the reserves at hand were thrown. But Chernyakhovsky parried the counterattack and sent the 2nd Panzer Corps around Kaunas, the success of which predetermined the outcome of the operation. On August 1, Kaunas was liberated. In these battles, the style of the new front commander was very clearly manifested - the search for non-standard solutions, boldness of design, decisiveness and speed of action. The large-scale success of the 3rd Belorussian Front created the most favorable opportunities for the successful offensive of other fronts. By that time, the enemy's line of defense had been moved far to the north, and the entire German grouping was stretched out and pressed against the seashore. There was a prospect of its deep coverage and cutting off from the main forces.

But the German command was also aware of this prospect.

511

Tivu. Reserves were deployed against the Soviet formations breaking through to the Gulf of Riga. They delayed the successfully launched offensive of the 1st Baltic Front near Jelgava "in the direction of Kaunas. Protracted battles began. The advancing Soviet units were losing momentum. Then the front commander, General I.Kh. in a breakthrough to the Gulf of Riga its reserve - the mechanized brigade of Colonel S. D. Kremer. Breaking into the deep rear of the enemy, the brigade made a 60-km march, captured the city of Tukums on the move and went to the coast. The entire Army Group "North" was cut off The threat of a gigantic encirclement of the most powerful Wehrmacht grouping in the Baltics was brewing.

From the memoirs of a German officer O. Kärnusaa:

"What appeared before our eyes is hardly describable. It was no longer a retreat, but a panicked, reckless flight.

Everyone and everything was moving towards Dunaburg - trucks, wheeled vehicles, motorcycles. And all filled to the brim with people. No one could be forced to stop. It was like a river overflowing its banks when its tributaries fill it up after heavy rains.

The road barely contained the turbulent flow. This spectacle told us everything. It testified that the Russians must have penetrated deeper into our territory than expected, and sowed panic in the rear units.

The news of the threat of a new encirclement caused a new attack of Hitler's anger, he immediately removed the commander of the army group, General G. Frisner, and appointed General F. Scherner in his place. And although the situation of the troops was close to catastrophic, Scherner did what seemed impossible. Having quickly gathered all the available reserves into a fist, he threw them into a breakthrough with the task of breaking through the corridor to Army Group North. On

the path of Scherner's shock divisions stood up directed commando

1 Carius Otto. "Tigers" in the mud. Memoirs of a German tank hundred / Per. St. Lisogorsky. - M.: ZAO Tsentrpoligraf, 2004. S. 199.

512

the front of the 19th tank corps of General I.D. Vasiliev. Fierce battles broke out. The tankers managed to stop the German strike, once again everything depended on whose actions - Scherner or Baghramyan - turned out to be more skillful and fast. More and more reserves were sent to the place of impact from both sides. The Headquarters, realizing the complexity of the situation, in early August transferred the 5th Guards Tank Army to the 1st Baltic Front. Rotmistrov's tankers, having made a 200-km march, immediately entered the battle, having managed, together with parts of the 2nd Guards Army, General P.G. Chanchibadze to repel the advance of the Germans. Then, following their usual pattern, the German command began to look for vulnerabilities in the Soviet defense. On August 20, Scherner struck Tukums from the west and north. At the same time, the German fleet landed troops on the coast of the Gulf of Riga. Tukums was surrounded, and its garrison succeeded, with heavy losses, in breaking through to link up with its troops. On August 21, German troops restored contact with the troops of Army Group North. With great difficulty, General Baghramyan managed to stop the further advance of the enemy on Yelgava.

Meanwhile, formations of the 2nd Baltic Front also went on the offensive in the general direction of Riga, very soon they achieved success in the Daugavpils direction. Having broken through powerful defensive lines, the front completed the immediate task set by the Headquarters, and its commander, General A.I. Eremenko received a new task—to liberate Riga no later than August 10 and reach the coast of the Gulf of Riga, for which the troops of the front had to travel over 200 km. And not just to pass, but to break through the powerful system of fortifications created by the enemy on the outskirts of the Gulf of Riga. But there were not enough forces in any direction - Eremenko's troops reached the approaches to Riga only by the end of the month, and then only in order to begin preparing the assault on this large city, also turned by the Germans into a fortress.

According to the original plan of the operation, the 3rd Baltic Front of General I.I. Maslennikov, his actions became for the German command

17 A. Kilichenkov 513

complete surprise. On August 25, Tartu was liberated, which immediately threatened the flank and rear of the Narva Task Force, which was defending the approaches to Estonia. German reserves were also sent against the rapidly advancing along the shore of Lake Peipsi, the Soviet troops, who managed to stop

to lead the offensive of the front of General Maslennikov. And in this direction, the Soviet offensive quickly fizzled out. But then the troops of the Leningrad Front came into action. On July 24, they quickly broke through the enemy defenses and liberated Narva two days later. However, the brilliantly launched offensive ended just as quickly - it was not possible to break through the line following Narva. The troops of the Leningrad Front also went on the defensive.

This was the end of the first stage of the liberation of the Baltic States. The task set by the Stavka could not be solved. The troops of the four fronts, despite all their superiority, were unable to either pin the enemy to the coast or cut the group. They failed, although the very configuration of the front—the stretch of the German group along the seashore for more than 460 km, which made it difficult to maneuver, the openness of the rear from the coast, where it was constantly necessary to wait for the landing—created all the possibilities for this. When preparing an offensive in the Baltic states, the General Staff and the Headquarters again preferred their "tried" operational method of a series of strikes on a wide front with the aim of breaking it up and collapsing it. This technique led to brilliant results during the Bagration operation, but it did not work in the Baltic states, although the balance of forces was approximately equal. The main reason for such different results should be sought in the differences in design. In Byelorussia, the Soviet command managed to develop an unexpected solution, which made it possible, having achieved complete surprise, to strike at the weakest sector of the defense and impose its will on the enemy. Skillful command and control of the troops during the operation made it possible to build on the initial success. In the Baltics, the actions of the Soviet command were reduced to a frontal offensive along the entire line, well known to the enemy. Every front

, sought to break through to the sea in his area, but the forces on the

514

no one had enough. The fronts squeezed the enemy out of his positions. As a result, Leningradsky and 2nd Baltic managed to advance only 20-120 km during the operation. The consequence of the unresolved common task of defeating Army Group North was the need to conduct another series of operations by the forces of the same fronts in September 1944, united by the general plan of the Baltic strategic operation.

By that time, the German command, instead of the speedy withdrawal of its troops from the Baltic states, began to transfer reinforcements. By the beginning of September, Army Group North already had 55 divisions, which included up to 730 thousand people, 1,216 tanks and assault guns, almost 400 aircraft, about 7,000 guns and mortars. The troops managed to create a new line of defense, in some directions it had up to four fortified lines.

The Headquarters set the same task for the troops of the four fronts - to defeat the Army Group "North", the Baltic Fleet was supposed to prevent the evacuation of enemy forces by sea. On

12 armies were deployed along an almost 500-kilometer front, which included up to 900 thousand people, 3,081 tanks and self-propelled guns, 2,643 aircraft, 17,483 guns and mortars?.

The offensive began in mid-September. Riga was chosen as the main direction, three fronts attacked here at once. But this time, neither the Stavka nor the command of the fronts bothered to look for any original solution. The choice of the direction of attack for the enemy turned out to be obvious, he expected a strike in this place, the most prepared defense was located there and reserves were concentrated. Heavy fighting began to break through the defense in depth. Chief of Staff of the 2nd Baltic Front, General L.M. Sandalov later recalled: "There were few ... tanks and self-propelled guns in direct support of the infantry. It also had an effect on the fact that we did not show due flexibility and inventiveness. The blows were delivered all the time in the same places, trying to break through exactly where it was planned. But,

<sup>1</sup> See: Shtemenko S. M. Decree. op. S. 293. ? See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 3. S. 161.

515

Probably, it was possible to come up with some kind of workaround. But no one dared to propose changes to the adopted offensive plan: it was developed by the Headquarters and approved by Stalin. And this meant that no arguments would be taken into account. The Supreme Commander-in-Chief did not tolerate the revision of the documents that came out of the Headquarters """. It was not possible to take Riga on the move, the only tangible result of the first days of the offensive was the weakening of the enemy's already small formations, the fettering of his few reserves. In this situation, going on the offensive 17 September Leningrad Front forced the enemy to begin the withdrawal of troops from Estonia. Tallinn was liberated on September 22. But the retreating troops strengthened the defense of Riga, and the fighting here finally acquired a protracted character. Only on September 24, the Headquarters, realizing the futility of further "gnawing through" the Riga defensive line, orders to change the direction of the main attack, deploying troops to Memel (Klaipeda).

The decision to use the maneuver immediately paid off. The troops of the 1st Baltic Front, which went on the offensive on October 5, were able to quickly break through the enemy's defense front in a sector 200 km wide and, on the sixth day of the offensive, reach the sea in the Palanga region, thereby cutting off Army Group North from East Prussia. The command of the army group began a hasty transfer of reserves to Memel, weakening the defenses of Riga, which was immediately used by formations of the 2nd and 3rd Baltic fronts. On October 15, after a two-day assault, Riga was liberated. But even this success did not mean the successful completion of the operation - the enemy withdrew to Courland, where in the end there were 34 Wehrmacht divisions together



ste with fleet units and rear units. In addition, the enemy continued to hold large ports - Me-

, stranded and Liepaja, actively using them for the evacuation of troops and technology in Prussia. The Baltic Fleet was given the task of preventing the evacuation of the enemy, but this

1 Sandalov L.M. Difficult frontiers. - M.: Military Publishing House, 1965. P. 71.

516

he failed to solve the dacha - about a third of the entire Courland group was taken to Germany, along with hundreds of thousands of civilians, rear units and services. The evacuation of the Courland grouping in its scale became one of the largest in the history of the Second World War. At the same time, the German units retained their combat effectiveness, successfully repulsing all attacks of the Soviet troops. And only at the end of May 1945 did the Courland group capitulate. More than 284 thousand soldiers and officers of the Zermacht surrendered into captivity.

The fighting in the Baltic in the autumn of 1944 proved to be very difficult for the Red Army. The total losses of the four fronts and the Baltic Fleet in September-November amounted to 280,090 soldiers and officers, of which 61,468 were irretrievable, 522 tanks and self-propelled guns, 779 aircraft, 2,593 guns and mortars were lost!

The second assault on the Mannerheim Line. The defeat of the German troops near Leningrad forced the political elite of Finland to re-evaluate the prospects for participation in the war and begin to clarify the conditions for concluding a truce with the Soviet Union. However, the conditions of the Soviet side - a break with Germany, the internment of German troops in Finland, the restoration of the 1940 border, the return of Soviet prisoners of war - turned out to be unacceptable. The resumption of hostilities became inevitable.

At the same time, the task set by the Soviet Supreme High Command to defeat the Finnish army in the summer of 1944 turned out to be very difficult. By that time, on the Karelian Isthmus, Finnish troops had created a system of fortifications, which, in depth (up to 120 km) and power, surpassed the defense that existed in 1939-1940. The fortifications of the "Mannerheim Line" were restored and three new lines of defense were created. No less powerful defense was created in Karelia along the entire length from Lake Onega to Lake Ladoga: The Finnish command had 14 infantry and one tank divisions, 8 infantry and one cavalry brigades. They included 268 thousand people, 1,930 guns and mi

1 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 299, 486.

517

guns, 110 tanks and assault guns, 248 combat aircraft, 33 ships and about 100 naval aircraft. 160 German and Finnish ships were concentrated in the Gulf of Finland, which could offer serious resistance to the Soviet naval forces.

All this meant that the Red Army had to conduct a second assault on the Mannerheim Line, but incomparably more powerful. This time, the troops of the Leningrad (commander - General of the Army L.A. Govorov) and Karelian (commander - General of the Army K.A. Meretskov) fronts with the support of the Baltic Fleet, the Ladoga and Onega military flotillas and partisan detachments. The Vyborg-Petrozavodsk operation to break through the Finnish defenses on the Karelian Isthmus began on June 10, and nine days later all three lines of defense were broken through. By the end of June 20, the troops of the Leningrad Front captured Vyborg: The basis of success was the overwhelming superiority of the Red Army in forces - in terms of people by 1.7 times, tanks and self-propelled guns - by 7.3, aircraft - by 6.2, guns and mortars - by 5, 21. The main structures of the "Mannerheim Line" were destroyed by heavy and super-heavy artillery of the army and navy. To support the troops, naval and coastal guns of the Baltic Fleet with a caliber from 100 to 406 mm were involved. The naval artillery, distinguished by its long range and accuracy of fire, the most powerful projectiles weighing up to 1000 kg, literally broke through the Finnish defenses. The front command did not repeat the mistakes of 1939 and sent troops to the attack only after the destruction of the enemy's main defensive structures by artillery and aviation. The Finns tried to stop the offensive with a counterattack of the reserves, but this did not help much. The call of Field Marshal K. Mannerheim to the army did not help either - strength took strength. After the capture of Vyborg, the troops of the Leningrad and Karelian fronts received the task of completely clearing the Karelian Isthmus of the enemy. The Finnish command turned to its ally for help, but the Germans, constrained by the simultaneous offensive in Belarus and the Baltic states, did not

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 3. S. 148.

518

were able to provide significant assistance to the Finnish army. The offensive of the Red Army continued. It was only stopped at the beginning of July at the Finnish border. Armistice negotiations soon began. The armistice agreement was signed on 19 September. Finland left the war.

The Vyborg-Petrozavodsk operation is notable for the unusually high concentration of forces and means in the breakthrough areas, which made it possible to quickly break through the most powerful enemy defenses. During the fighting, 13 infantry and [tank divisions, 7 infantry and 1 cavalry brigade of the Finns were defeated. However, the tasks

placed in front of the fronts by the high command, were not resolved. Neither the Leningrad nor the Karelian fronts were able to enter the territory of Finland. Already on the border they were stopped by the fierce and skillful resistance of the enemy. The Finnish army once again demonstrated its highest fighting spirit and ability to conduct highly effective operations. The losses of the Soviet troops turned out to be high this time as well. The forces participating in the offensive lost 96,375 soldiers and officers, of which 23,674 were irretrievably lost. The loss of equipment amounted to 294 tanks, 311 aircraft and 489 guns and mortars.

The second "Stalingrad" between the Prut and the Dniester. The partial unfulfillment of tasks by the Red Army in the Baltic and Karelia was explained, among other things, by large-scale actions on the southern flank of the Soviet-German front, where the main forces were concentrated and where strategic success was planned. By the end of the summer of 1944, the prerequisites for the collapse of the entire Nazi coalition arose, which should have significantly brought the end of the war closer. The key link in this plan was the withdrawal from the war of Romania, perhaps Germany's main ally in Eastern Europe, whose importance was determined primarily by the supply of almost three-quarters of all the oil consumed by the Reich.

The Soviet military-political leadership developed

1 See Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 294-295, 486.

b 519

a plan for a grand offensive in the Balkans, which was supposed to withdraw Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria from the war, thereby depriving Germany of the most important types of strategic raw materials and food. A feature of the preparation of the offensive of the 2nd Ukrainian Front under the command of General of the Army R.Ya. Malinovsky was misleading the enemy about the time and place of the strike. During this period, a grandiose offensive was unfolding in Belorussia, and the transfer of the front's mobile formations there - two tank armies - disoriented the enemy. The German command decided that Malinovsky was not going to attack, and, in turn, began to transfer reserves to reinforce Army Group Center, which was defeated by the troops of Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky. 12 divisions were sent to the north, including 6 armored and 1 motorized. By the time of the Soviet offensive, General G. Frisner, commander of the Southern Ukraine army troupe, had up to 900,000 soldiers and officers, over 400 tanks, 810 aircraft, and about 7,600 guns and mortars at his disposal. They were opposed by the forces of the 2nd (commander - General of the Army R.Ya. Malinovsky) and 3rd (commander - General of the Army F.I. Tolbukhin) Ukrainian fronts, which outnumbered the enemy in manpower by 1.4 times, according to the number of tanks - 4.7 times, aircraft - 2.7 times, guns and mortars - 2.1 times.

The weak point of the enemy grouping was its mixed composition, which included about half of the Rumanian divisions. The basis of the grouping was the 6th German field army located in a deep ledge and covering Chisinau - the same one that was destroyed in the Stalingrad "cauldron", and then restored by Hitler's special order. During 1943-1944. this army was repeatedly under the threat of a secondary encirclement; but each time she happily avoided him. On the flanks of the 6th Army were the 3rd and 4th Romanian armies, again the same ones that covered it at Stalingrad and through whose orders the units of the Red Army broke through, closing the encirclement. The weakness of this operational formation was compensated by a large number of

520

stvom defensive structures that were created by the enemy in the areas of the expected strike of the Red Army.

The plan of operation, prepared by the headquarters of both fronts and approved by the Headquarters, provided for the classic version of the encirclement with a breakthrough of the defense on the far flanks. In many ways, it was reminiscent of the plan of Operation Uranus - it was planned to break through the defenses in the sectors of both Romanian armies and surround the formations of the German 6th Army located in the ledge. The experience of the Stalingrad operation was also taken into account. Up to 85% of all forces of the fronts were concentrated in the breakthrough areas, which ensured an unprecedented superiority over the enemy - in personnel - 4-8 times, in artillery - 6-11 times, in tanks and self-propelled guns - 7 times. From the very beginning, it was planned to quickly destroy the encircled grouping, for which over 70% of all formations of both fronts were involved. A great achievement was the skillfully carried out masking of the preparatory measures. The enemy until very recently could not reveal the plan.

The offensive of both Soviet fronts began on August 20 ... From the very beginning, the measures for its preparation had an effect. Already in the course of artillery preparation, the enemy command and control system was disrupted, his fire weapons were suppressed. New forms of artillery preparation had their effect. On the 2nd Ukrainian Front, all firepower, instead of the usual suppression of the front line of defense, was successively brought down on the firing positions of artillery and the enemy control system. On the 3rd Ukrainian Front, after moving the fire shaft into the depths of the enemy's defenses, infantrymen in the first trenches with loud cries of "Hurrah!" began to raise the mother of the stuffed soldiers, simulating an attack. The enemy infantry quickly left their shelters and began to repel the blow, opening fire from all types of weapons. The observation posts of the Soviet artillery immediately spotted the "revived" firing points of the enemy and brought down on them the already full power of fire. As a result, the enemy defenses were destroyed, all three advancing armies of the front advanced up to 16 km by the end of the first day, reaching the second line of defense. Such a crushing start

521

The Soviet offensive led to the rapid demoralization of the Romanian troops, their organized resistance was suppressed on the very first day.

By the end of the second day of the offensive, the Romanian defense was broken through to the full depth and by the troops of General R.Ya. Malinovsky. Both fronts began to encircle the 6th German Army. Co- . the commander of the South Ukraine group turned to Hitler for permission to withdraw, but it was received too late. On August 23, Soviet troops closed the encirclement around the German group near Chisinau and a number of Romanian formations west of the Dniester estuary. The next day, Chisinau was liberated, on the same day the 3rd Romanian army capitulated. On August 25, it was possible to dismember the encircled German troops. By this time, two encirclement fronts were created - internal and external "the distance between which reached 80-100 km. It seemed that the operation near Kishinev was taking place classically, as in exercises. But even here management problems that had not yet been completely eliminated mi troops - commanders of the fronts too zealously monitored the observance of the demarcation line of troops, which led to a breakthrough from the boiler of five German divisions that attacked the rear of the 2nd Ukrainian Front. With great difficulty, Malinovsky's troops managed to stop their breakthrough to the Carpathians, and then again surround and destroy |

The overall result of the operation, called Yassko-Kishinevskaya, was the destruction of 22 German divisions, of which 18 were encircled. 208.6 thousand soldiers and officers were taken prisoner, more than 830 tanks, 338 aircraft and assault guns, about 3,500 guns, over 33,000 vehicles were captured. The losses of the troops of the Red Army and the Danube Flotilla on August 20-29 amounted to 67,130 soldiers and officers, of which 13,197 were irretrievable. During the offensive, 75 tanks, 111 aircraft, 108 guns and mortars were lost?. In terms of the ratio of the losses of the parties, the Yassy-Kishinev operation became one of the most productive operations of the Red Army throughout the war.

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 3. S. 85, 97. ? See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 297-298, 486.

522

With this ratio, its military-political results look especially impressive. The entire southern flank of the German front collapsed. The changed situation at the front led to a "chain reaction" among Germany's allies and satellites—Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia.

On August 23, the day when the encirclement near Chisinau was closed, the pro-German regime of Marshal I. Antonescu was overthrown in Bucharest. The performance was led by King Ru-

Mynia Mihai. Marshal Antonescu was arrested, and on the same day the king announced his withdrawal from the war and acceptance of the armistice terms proposed by the Soviet Union. The next day, Hitler ordered the command of Army Group South Ukraine to suppress the uprising. On the morning of August 24, German troops, with air support, launched an assault on Bucharest. The scheme of action in Warsaw was repeated, apparently, therefore, General Stachel, the former commandant of Warsaw, was placed at the head of the German troops. But there was a significant difference - the king was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces of Romania, and the entire Romanian army was under his command. On August 24, Romania declared war on Germany and began hostilities against German troops. The command of the Red Army sent the 6th tank and 5th air armies to help the rebels. All this made it possible not only to defend Bucharest, but also to take control of the oil-producing region of Ploiesti, which was of strategic importance for Germany.

The general result of these events was the withdrawal from the war of Romania, the prospect of an exit from the fascist bloc of Bulgaria and Hungary opened up. The troops of the Red Army continued operations against the army group "Southern Ukraine". The fighting in Romania lasted a total of seven months. During them, the Red Army lost over 286 thousand soldiers and officers, the total irretrievable losses amounted to 69 thousand people. The troops lost 2,249 tanks and self-propelled guns, 528 aircraft, and 2,083 guns and mortars.

On August 26, an uprising began in Bulgaria against the pro-German regime. September 4, the new government of K. Muraviev

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book Z3. S. 99.

523

va declared Bulgaria's observance of strict neutrality, but on September 5 the Soviet government declared war on Bulgaria. Under these conditions, the Bulgarian government chose to declare war on Germany. The troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front entered the territory of Bulgaria, which seriously complicated the already difficult position of the Wehrmacht in the Balkans. The ports on the Black Sea were completely lost, the German troops in Greece and Yugoslavia were under threat: The total losses of the Red Army during the operations on the territory of Bulgaria amounted to 12,750 soldiers and officers, of which 977 people were irretrievable!

At the end of September, preparations began for the Belgrade strategic operation, its goal was to defeat the German army group "Serbia" by joint actions of the Soviet, Bulgarian troops and the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NOAYU). And although the combined forces significantly outnumbered the enemy - 4.4 times in manpower, 3.4 times in tanks, 3.6 times in the number of aircraft and 2.1 times in artillery - the operation was not easy. The fighting, which began on September 25, ended only on October 20 with the liberation of Belgrade. The total losses of German troops exceeded 45 thousand soldiers and officers. Participation

the formations of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts and the Danube flotilla that fought in the operation lost a total of 14,488 people, of which 4,350 were killed: By the end of 1944, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia were completely liberated by the joint actions of the Red Army and the NOAU, and in the remaining territory of Yugoslavia, units of the NOAU continued to fight with the German troops. th

At the end of August 1944, an uprising against the German occupation began in Slovakia as well. On August 30, the exile government of Czechoslovakia in London appealed to all Slovaks and Czechs to support the uprising. Soviet transport aviation began the transfer of weapons, ammunition and medicines for the rebels. But their actions were scattered, and at the end of October, German troops defeated the rebel army. A large-scale guerrilla struggle began,

1 See: Great Patriotic War... S. 106. ? There. S. 113.

524

continued until the arrival of the Red Army. September - ok

In October 1944, the troops of the 1st and 4th Ukrainian fronts held

The East Carpathian operation, having made a breakthrough through the Carpathians under the most difficult conditions and entering the territory of the Slovak Republic. At the same time, 6 enemy divisions were defeated, but more than 31 thousand soldiers and officers were captured. However, the Soviet troops also suffered heavy losses - 126,211 people, which amounted to more than a third of their total number, of which 26,843 were killed. 478 tanks, 192 aircraft, 962 weapons were lost in battles.

,dia and mortar!'.

In mid-October, an attempt to withdraw from the war was made by the leadership of Hungary, but it was severely suppressed by the actions of its ally. German sabotage detachments carried out a military coup, as a result of which the fascist regime of F. Salashi came to power. His main task was to organize the defense of the Hungarian border from the advancing troops of the Red Army. A powerful grouping of German and Hungarian troops was concentrated in Hungary as part of four armies, which met the advancing units of the 2nd Ukrainian Front. powerful and skillfully organized counters. However, the front commander, Marshal R.Ya. Malinovsky managed on the move, without an operational pause, repelling the enemy's counterattacks, to organize the preparation and conduct of the Debrecen operation to break through the enemy's defenses and enter the territory of Hungary. By the end of October, the troops of the front approached Budapest and tried to break through its defenses,

but the enemy managed to occupy the previously prepared fortifications and successfully repelled this attempt. In November-December, the troops of Marshal Malinovsky made two more attempts to defeat the enemy grouping near Budapest, but failed. And only at the end of December, after the combined efforts of the two fronts - the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian, it was possible to surround the entire Budapest grouping of the enemy - over 188 thousand soldiers and officers. The offer of surrender was rejected, and the Soviet parliamentarians were killed. The liquidation of the encircled group is completed

was sewn only on February 13, 1945. About 138 thousand people surrendered.

1 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 297-299, 486.

525

German and Hungarian soldiers and officers. The losses of the Red Army in two operations - Debrecen and Budapest - amounted to 404,092 people, of which 99,739 were irretrievable. The troops lost 1,766 tanks and self-propelled guns, 293 aircraft, and 4,127 guns and mortars. :

By the end of 1944, the Red Army, having entered the territory of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, continued its movement to the west, deeply enveloping the borders of the Third Reich from the south and southeast. On the northern flank of the front, Soviet troops were already at the borders of East Prussia. But in the coming last year of the war, the western direction nevertheless became the main direction, in a straight line to the heart of the Reich - Berlin.

To Berlin! The beginning of 1945 did not bode well for the Nazi regime - the final and inevitable defeat was approaching. The Red Army from the east and the troops of the allies from the west approached the borders of Germany. The colossal superiority of the military and economic potential of the anti-Hitler coalition was increasingly evident. While the Wehrmacht, suffering one defeat after another, was forced to roll back on all fronts, the Anglo-American aircraft methodically destroyed the country's industry and infrastructure, further exacerbating the unfavorable balance of potentials of the opposing sides. .

Paradoxical as it may seem, but even in this situation, the military-political leadership of Germany still counted on the possibility of a favorable outcome. Moreover, it was supposed to change the whole course of the war. The Supreme Military Command of the Third Reich relied on a tough defense along the entire perimeter of its borders. It was planned by stubborn defense to hold back the advance of the Red Army in the east, preventing it from advancing deep into Germany, while in the west it was supposed to cool the offensive ardor of the Allies with powerful blows in the style of the campaigns of 1940 and persuade them to conclude separate agreements.



Confidence in the reality of these plans was based on

1 See: Russia and the USSR in wars... S. 297-301-302, 316, 486.

526

stored military forces of Germany. The command of the Wehrmacht still had a very impressive force at its disposal - 295 divisions and 30 brigades, along with them, 16 Hungarian and 4 Italian divisions continued to fight. The morale of the troops, despite a series of heavy defeats in the 1944 campaigns, remained exceptionally high. Moreover, the idea of an imminent turning point in the war was introduced into the minds of the Wehrmacht soldiers, which was to be provided by the "weapon of retaliation" or miracle weapon created by the scientists of the Third Reich.

From the memoirs of a German officer O. Karnus about a conversation with G. Himmler:

"Himmler listened attentively, and then suddenly changed the subject:

- What do you think, returning home, about the mood of people?

I quite frankly said what I thought about it:

"Everyone is waiting for a weapon that can drive a terrifying enemy out of our airspace... our people have already shown themselves to be tough enough to know the truth. He already knows that we must continue to work hard to turn the wheel of fortune in the war in our favor...

The Reichsfuehrer SS answered quite calmly:

"I am aware of the suffering of our people. I also know that our new anti-aircraft defenses must become an indispensable condition for us to be able to keep going. In a comparatively short time, we will be able to stop the flights of the Americans in "ceremonial formation" above us. Our new jet aircraft will soon be put into operation. New anti-aircraft missiles have been tested, some of them manned and others radio-controlled ... Without a comprehensive countermeasure against the bombing, we will not last long, but the situation will soon change completely ... The necessary condition for this, of course, must be the ability to hold our fronts at all costs for another year. We need this year in order to complete without interruption the work on the weapons that we create to stun the enemy!

In the West, 1.9 million soldiers acted against the Allies and

1 Carius Otto. Decree. op. S. 239.

527

officers. On the Eastern Front, which still remained the main one, there were a total of 185 divisions - 3.7 million soldiers and officers, 8.1 thousand tanks and assault guns, more than 4 thousand combat aircraft, as well as 56.2 thousand guns and mortars. The Red Army maintained a significant superiority over the enemy. It included about 6.7 million people, 107.3 thousand guns and mortars, 12.1 thousand tanks and self-propelled artillery installations and 14.7 thousand combat

aircraft.

The German command intended to compensate for this advantage by relying on a powerful defense system with a total depth of up to 500 km, which included seven independent lines defended by the troops of Group A under the command of General J. Harpe. However, the troops at his disposal were not enough, and as a result, only the first, Vistula line, up to 70 km deep, was occupied by them. General Harpe planned to defend the lines consistently, gradually weakening the Soviet offensive. The analysts of the German headquarters were sure that the main attack would come from the south through Hungary and Czechoslovakia. But this time, both German intelligence and staff specialists made a major miscalculation - the Red Army General Staff planned a series of powerful strikes in the main direction - Berlin.

By that time, Soviet military art at all levels, from tactical to strategic, had reached the highest level in the entire period of the war. And in the planning of the forthcoming campaign, this was fully reflected. By the beginning of 1945, after three and a half years of war, the opponents returned almost to the starting line of its beginning. But now they have changed places - now the Red Army had to strike a decisive blow that determined the outcome of the entire war, and the Wehrmacht had to predict and repel this blow.

The plan for this Soviet offensive was developed as early as the autumn of 1944. The main blow was to be delivered by the troops of the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian fronts, they were supposed to break the enemy defenses in the Berlin direction and reach the German capital along the shortest straight line. Troops of the 2nd

528

and the 3rd Belorussian Fronts were supposed to ensure this strike from the north, cutting off the enemy's Prussian grouping from the main forces and blocking the enemy's Prussian grouping on the Baltic coast. The 1st Ukrainian Front was to strike around Berlin, covering the shock groups of the 1st Belorussian Front from the south.

During the period of preparation for the new offensive, serious changes were made in the front management system. Stalin actually abolished the institution of representatives of the Headquarters in the directions of the main strikes. At the same time, the commanders of the fronts were changed.

From the memoirs of Marshal G.K. Zhukov:

"... The Supreme called me and dryly asked:

- How do you plan to transfer the leadership of all fronts to the Headquarters in the future?

I understood that he meant to abolish the representatives of the Headquarters for coordinating the fronts, and I felt that this idea arose not only as a result of our dispute yesterday. The war was coming to an end, it remained to carry out several final operations, and I.V. Stalin probably wanted to be at the head of these operations alone.

"Yes, the number of fronts has decreased," I answered. - The length of the common front has also been reduced, the management of the fronts has been simplified, and there is a full opportunity to control the fronts directly from the Headquarters.

Are you saying this without offense?

`

- Ana, why be offended? I think that Vasilevsky and I are not stay unemployed," I joked.

That same day in the evening, the Supreme Commander called me to his office and said:

- The 1st Belorussian Front is in the Berlin direction. We think to put you in this direction.

I replied that I was ready to command any front, but I noticed that K.K. Rokossovsky is unlikely to be pleased if he is released from the 1st Belorussian Front.

"You will continue to be my deputy," said I.V. Stalin. - As for insults, we are not red maidens. I'll talk to Rokossovsky right now...

529

It seems to me that after this conversation Konstantin Konstantinovich and I lost those warm comradely relations that had been between us for many years. Apparently, he believed that I, to some extent, asked myself to stand at the head of the troops of the 1st Belorussian Front. If so, then this is his deep delusion.

From the memoirs of Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky:

"... the officer on duty reported that the Stavka was calling me to the HF. The apparatus had a Supreme Commander. He said that I was appointed commander of the troops of the 2nd Byelorussian Front. It was so unexpected that I immediately asked in the heat of the moment:

"Why such a disfavor that they transfer me from the main direction to a secondary section?"

Stalin replied that I was mistaken: the sector to which they were transferring me was included in the general western direction, on which the troops of three fronts would operate - the 2nd Belorussian, 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian; the success of this decisive operation will depend on the close interaction of these fronts, so the Stavka paid special attention to the selection of commanders.

Regarding my transfer, Stalin said that G.K. Zhukov.

- How do you look at this candidate?

I replied that the candidate was worthy..."2.

As a result of these movements, Marshal G.K. became the commander of the 1st Belorussian Front. Zhukov, his armies were to capture the enemy capital and put a winning point in the war. Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky had to leave the troops, which he led for more than two years, having traveled with them from Stalingrad to Warsaw. In February 1945, another representative of the Stavka, Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky - received a similar appointment to the post of front commander, he replaced the deceased commander of the 3rd Belorussian Front

1 Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. pp. 172-173. ?  
Rokossovsky K.K. Decree. op. S. 355.

530

Army General I.D. Chernyakhovsky. But the institution of Stavka representatives was still not completely eliminated. Marshal S.K. remained in this position until the end of the war. Timoshenko, who coordinated the actions of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Ukrainian fronts.

For a breakthrough in the Berlin direction, the High Command of the Red Army concentrated about a third of all its available forces - 2.5 million people, more than 7,000 tanks and self-propelled guns, 5,000 combat aircraft, 33,500 guns and mortars. This ensured overwhelming superiority over the enemy in the offensive zone of the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian fronts: in manpower - 4 times, in artillery and tanks - 6 times, in the number of aircraft - 8 times. Such a superiority in forces made it possible for the advancing fronts to conduct "deep operations" as they were seen by Tukhachevsky and Triandafillov in the mid-1930s. Given the balance of forces, their deployment and the goals of the parties, the Soviet military leaders had the opportunity to "get even" for the defeats of 1941.

The superiority in the forces of the 2nd and 3rd Belorussian fronts was also very impressive. Together with the troops of the 1st Baltic Front involved in the offensive, they numbered | 669 thousand people, 4,000 tanks and self-propelled guns, more than 3,000 aircraft,

25,400 guns and mortars. This ensured superiority over the troops of Army Group Center under the command of General G. Reinhardt by 2-3 times in personnel and artillery and 4-5 times in tanks and aircraft. Moreover, the commanders of both fronts boldly took the risk of concentrating the main mass of troops on the breakthrough sites - up to half of the rifle divisions, up to 90% of the artillery, tanks and practically all aviation. Real superiority over the enemy increased to 5-9 times.

Preparations for the offensive of the Red Army were in full swing when the situation in Western Europe suddenly became more complicated. On December 16, quite unexpectedly for the Allied command, Operation Watch on the Rhine began, its goal was to defeat the Anglo-American troops in Northern France and Belgium. Hitler planned to repeat his 1940 success at Dunkirk. At first, the troops of Army Group "B" Feldmar

531

G. Rundstedt's plan was a success. In the defense of the allied forces in the Ardennes, a salient more than 100 km wide was pierced, into which the shock units of Army Group B poured.

From the memoirs of General D. Eisenhower:

"On the morning of December 17, 1944, it became clear that the Germans had launched a major offensive. They broke through our defenses on the front of the 106th and 28th divisions. Contradictory reports began to arrive at the headquarters, but it was obvious that the enemy, using a significant number of tank formations, was rapidly advancing in a westerly direction...'

In two important respects, the enemy achieved a certain amount of surprise. The first of these was the timing of the attack. Taking into account the heavy defeats we inflicted on the enemy in the late summer and autumn of 1944, and the extreme measures he had to take to form new formations, we believed that he would not be able to prepare for a major offensive in such short time. The second surprise for us was the strength with which he launched the offensive. The mobile reserve was the 6th Panzer Army - a fresh and powerful formation recently arrived at the front from Germany ... ''.

From the memoirs of W. Churchill:

"The Germans had, in essence, a master plan. Rundstedt concentrated two panzer armies ... altogether 10 panzer and 14 infantry divisions. This huge force, led by tanks, was designed to break through our weak center in the Ardennes, reach the Meuse River, rush to the north and northwest, cut the Allied front into two parts, capture the port of Antwerp and cut off this vital artery of our northern armies. This bold strike was planned by Hitler

rum, who did not want to hear about any changes in him that were proposed by his wavering generals. In support of this operation, which was conceived as a last effort,

! Eisenhower D. Crusade to Europe / Per. from English. EAT. Fedotov. - Smolensk: Rusich, 2000. S. 390.

at

532

the remnants of German aviation were collected, and at the same time op-. a certain role was assigned to parachute troops, saboteurs and agents dressed in military uniforms of the allies.

The success of the German counter-offensive was greatly facilitated by non-flying weather, which deprived the Allies of their main striking force—numerous front-line aviation. In this difficult situation, General D. Eisenhower, Commander-in-Chief of the British and American troops, had high hopes for the expected Soviet offensive, which was supposed to divert the German forces.

From the memoirs of W. Churchill:

“During this period, Eisenhower and his staff, of course, were eager to find out if the Russians could do anything on their side to ease the pressure to which we were subjected in the West. All efforts by liaison officers in Moscow to get an answer from their Russian counterparts failed. In order to present the matter to the Soviet command most convincingly, Eisenhower sent his deputy air chief marshal Tedder on a special mission. He was greatly delayed due to the weather... |

Prime Minister to Marshal Stalin January 1945

“Very heavy fighting is going on in the West, and at any time big decisions may be required from the High Command. You yourselves know from your own experience how alarming the situation is when one has to defend a very wide front after a temporary loss of initiative. It is highly desirable and necessary for General Eisenhower to know in general terms what you intend to do, since this will, of course, affect all of his and our most important decisions ... I will be grateful if you can tell me whether we can count on a major Russian offensive on the Vistula front or somewhere else during January ... I consider the matter urgent.

... the answer was sent to me the next day.

| Churchill W. World War II. In 3 books. Book. 3. T. 5-6./Abbr.per.s

English - M.: Military Publishing House, 1991. S. 477.

533

Marshal Stalin to the Prime Minister January 7, 1945

"I received your message on the evening of January 7... |

We are preparing for the offensive, but the weather is not favorable for our offensive. However, taking into account the position of our allies on the Western Front, the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command decided to complete the preparations at an accelerated pace and, regardless of the weather, open wide offensive operations against the Germans along the entire central front no later than the second half of January. You can be sure that we will do everything that is possible to do in order to assist our glorious allied forces.

A direct consequence of this Stalinist promise was the beginning of the offensive on January 12 in adverse weather conditions, which ruled out the widespread use of aviation. The troops had to rely only on the support of artillery. On this day, the 1st Ukrainian Front launched an operation that received the title of Sandomierz-Silesian. Using his overwhelming superiority over the enemy, skillfully concentrating forces on the direction of the main attack, front commander Marshal I.S. Konev dealt a powerful blow to the troops of Army Group A under the command of General J. Harpe. On the very first day, the enemy defenses were overcome, and two tank armies of Generals D.D. Lelyushenko and P.S. Rybalko, aimed at the operational rear of the German grouping. During the six-day offensive, the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front, having repulsed the counterattacks of the German tank divisions, advanced 150 km and reached the planned offensive line twice as fast as the time scheduled by the plan. As a result of this offensive, the 4th German Panzer Army of General F. Guderian was defeated, but it still failed to encircle it, the remnants of the army retreated beyond the Oder.

On January 14, the 1st Belorussian Front began its offensive. On the second day of the Warsaw-Poznan operation, after the weather was clear, Soviet aviation finally began to operate. 16th Air Army of General S.I. Rudenko managed on the very first day to ensure undivided air supremacy,

' Churchill W. Decree. op. pp. 48-482.

534

having made over 3,400 sorties. Having received such powerful air cover, the shock forces of the front - the tank armies of Generals M.E. Katukov and S.I. Bogdanov - they would begin a rapid advance into the depths of the enemy defenses, immediately overturning the enemy reserves advanced towards them. Already

on the second day, Soviet tanks, bypassing Warsaw from the south, cut off the most important Warsaw-Berlin highway. At the same time, units of the 47th Army of General F.I. Perkhovich bypassed the Polish capital from the north. The threat of encirclement forced the German garrison to leave the city. On January 17, Warsaw was liberated as a result of a bold maneuver and a deep envelopment, which made it possible to avoid a bloody assault and save the lives of tens of thousands of soldiers and officers.

Simultaneously with the 1st Belorussian Front, the attack on the Chal and Front of Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky. But here the weather conditions turned out to be even more unfavorable, which did not allow even effective use of artillery. The introduction of two tank corps into battle did not change the situation. Only on the third day, after the weather improved and intensive air operations began, did the front manage to break through the enemy defenses. On January 17, the 5th Guards Tank Army of General V.T. was introduced into the gap. Volsky, which immediately changed the general situation. The tankers quickly advanced deep into the enemy defenses in the general direction towards the Baltic Sea. Parts of the 65th and 70th armies under the command of generals P.I. Batov and V.S. Popova, moving along the northern bank of the Vistula, captured the Modlin fortress. On the sixth day, the pace of the advance of the troops of the 2nd Belorussian Front turned out to be almost twice as high as was envisaged by the plan.

From the memoirs of Marshal G.K. Zhukov:

"The main role in the development of the offensive on the fronts after breaking through the enemy's defenses belonged to tank armies, separate tank and mechanized corps, which, in cooperation with aviation, were a fast-moving ram of enormous strength, paving the way for combined arms armies.

Voyle into the breakthrough, tank armies and mechanized

,

535

The Pus developed the offensive with full exertion of their forces, day and night without giving the enemy a break... crushed the enemy front, went to the communications of his troops, seized crossings and road junctions, sowed panic and disorganized the rear of the enemy.

The deep penetration of the armored troops behind enemy lines did not allow the fascist German troops to use most of the previously prepared lines for defense. After breaking through the Vistula fortified lines before reaching the Poznań meridian, the enemy was unable to organize a solid defense on almost any of the previously prepared lines.



The picture of the advance of the Red Army from the Vistula to the Oder was very reminiscent of the offensive of the Wehrmacht on Moscow in October 1941. In the same way, a giant gap was formed in the Soviet defense, and the path to the capital was opened, in the same way, rear units and cadets were thrown to meet the tank columns military schools, and it seemed that the enemy could not be stopped. The essential difference was that the main forces of the Soviet fronts on the outskirts of the capital found themselves in giant pockets near Vyazma and Bryansk, while the troops of the German army still managed to avoid the pockets between the Vistula and the Oder.

The overall result of the offensive of the Red Army in January 1945 was another disaster for the German front in the east. As the German General K. Tippelskirch, the author of the famous work "History of the Second World War", later noted: "The blow was so strong that it knocked over not only the divisions of the first echelon, but also rather large mobile reserves, pulled up by Hitler's categorical order very close to front ... By the evening of January 16, in the area from the Nida River to the Pilica River, there was no longer a continuous organically connected front ... "2. As usual, Hitler blamed the generals for the disaster. The commander of Army Group A, General J. Harpe, was replaced by a new confidant of the Fuhrer, General F. Scherner, General S. Luttwitz in

1 Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. pp. 207-208. ? There. pp. 188-189.

536

the post of commander of the 9th Army was replaced by General T. Busse. But these replacements did not give anything - the Red Army continued the offensive in the Berlin direction. By the end of January, the troops of the 1st Ukrainian and 1st Belorussian fronts reached the Oder, the last serious obstacle on the way to the capital of the Third Reich.

From the memoirs of the German General F. Mellenthin:

"... the front of German troops on the Vistula collapsed ... the Russian offensive developed with unprecedented strength and swiftness. It was clear that their Supreme High Command had completely mastered the technique of organizing the offensive of huge mechanized armies and that Stalin was determined to be the first to enter Berlin ...

Like thousands of other people, I followed these events with a feeling of utter despair... It is impossible to describe everything that happened between the Vistula and the Oder in the first months of 1945. Europe has not known anything like it since the fall of the Roman Empire.

Impressed by the first successes of the offensive, the Soviet command began to clearly overestimate the results achieved.

tats. Marshal Zhukov ordered tank armies and corps to advance at a rate of 70-100 km per day, and rifle formations at least 20-25 km. In the twentieth of January, the Headquarters requested the opinion of the commanders on plans for further actions. On January 26, Marshal Zhukov presented his decision on a non-stop attack on Berlin, covering it from the north. A day later, Marshal Konev presented a plan for an attack on Berlin; he also planned to reach the German capital by the end of February, but only from the south. The headquarters approved these plans 2.

The Military Council of the 1st Belorussian Front sent tentative estimates and instructions to the troops: "1. Opponent before 1st

\ Mellenthin F. Tank battles. Combat use of tanks in World War II. - St. Petersburg: Polygon, 1998. S. 412-413.

2 See: Shtemenko S. M. Decree. op. S. 316.

537

The Byelorussian Front does not yet have any large counterattack groups. The enemy does not have a continuous front of defense. It is now covering individual areas of research and in a number of sectors is trying to solve the problem of defense by active actions ... 2. The tasks of the front troops are to consolidate the success achieved by active actions in the next six days, two rounds of ammunition and a swift throw on February 15-16 to take Berlin ... ".

But these plans turned out to be unrealistic. The German command took urgent measures to strengthen the defense, urgently transferring reserves to the Berlin direction. In Eastern Pomerania, a new army group "Vistula" was created, led by the Reichsführer SS Himmler, it quickly intensified and soon turned into a serious threat to the right flank of Marshal Zhukov's front.

By that time, an almost 200 km gap had appeared between the 1st and 2nd Belorussian fronts. Zhukov had to deploy four combined-arms armies one after the other, and then his main striking force - both tank armies - front to the north. As a result, there were no forces left to continue the attack on Berlin. The Red Army, having not reached Berlin only 60 km, forced the price to stop and go on the defensive.

In the course of this grandiose offensive, the Red Army advanced 500 kilometers westward, liberating almost all of Polysha and invading German territory. During the offensive, 35 German divisions were completely defeated, 147,400 German soldiers and officers, about 14,000 weapons and mortars, [1,400 tanks and assault guns] were captured. At the same time, the losses of the Red Army turned out to be much less than the enemy. 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian fronts, numbering together with Polish troops more than two million people

century, lost 193,125 soldiers and officers, of which 43,251 were killed. The fronts lost 1,267 tanks and self-propelled artillery

1 Cited. Quoted from: Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. pp. 199-200.

538

Russian installations, 343 combat aircraft, 374 guns and mortars.

The participants in the operation explained the reasons for the failed "throw at Berlin" in different ways. Marshal Zhukov blamed the lagging rear and the 2nd Belorussian Front for this. "If the left flank of K.K. Rokossovsky will continue to stand still, the enemy will certainly take active actions against the stretched right flank of the 1st Belorussian Front, - G.K. Zhukov in his report to Stalin on January 31, 1945 - I ask you to order K.K. Rokossovsky to immediately advance with the 70th Army in a western direction ... ". The headquarters obliged the 2nd Belorussian Front to go on the offensive only on February 8, and the offensive itself began on February 10. But count on a powerful blow from the troops of Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky did not come. By that time, the main forces of the front were deployed on. in the north for operations against the enemy grouping in East Prussia, moreover, four armies were withdrawn from its composition and transferred to the 3rd Belorussian Front - three general shackles and one tank. It was this miscalculation of the Stavka, according to Marshal Rokossovsky, that became the main reason for the failure of the breakthrough to Berlin in February 1945. another direction, she did not consider it her duty to immediately reinforce the 2nd Byelorussian Front with at least two armies and several tank or mechanized corps to continue the operation in the western direction. Then what happened on the sector of the 1st Belorussian Front, when the right flank hung in the air because the 2nd Belorussian Front was unable to provide it, would not have happened. Perhaps the fall of Berlin would have happened much earlier ... "3.

It is obvious that neither the Headquarters nor the General Staff were able to adequately assess the power of the enemy grouping in East Prussia and to strengthen the 2nd Belorussian Front in a timely manner. Unexpected

1 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 297-303, 486. Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. P. 197. 3  
Rokossovsky K.K. Decree. op. S. 385.

539

for the Headquarters and the command of the 1st Belorussian Front turned out to be the pace of the offensive and the depth of advance of the shock groups of the front, which did not allow to prepare in advance

rear services. This is also evidenced in his memoirs by General S.M. Shtemenko, in February 1945 he acted as chief of the operational department of the General Staff of the Red Army. Describing the preparations for the Vistula-Oder operation, Shtemenko noted that "the General Staff was concerned about only one detail: how to coordinate the attack on Berlin by two fronts with Stalin's instructions that the capital of Nazi Germany should be taken by troops under the command of G.K. Zhukov? In other words, in the process of preparing the operation, the General Staff failed to foresee the real problems that arose during the attack on Berlin, and the Headquarters, or rather, Stalin, could not properly and timely coordinate the actions of the fronts in solving a common goal.

Before embarking on a new operation to break through to Berlin, the Soviet command had to carry out a series of large-scale operations in order to secure the flanks of the advancing fronts. Among them are the East Prussian, East Pomeranian, Lower and Upper Silesian operations. The longest and bloodiest of them was the East Prussian operation carried out from January 13 to April 25. In this operation, which lasted 103 days, the forces of three fronts were involved - the 1st Baltic (commander - General of the Army I.Kh. Bagramyan), 3rd Belorussian (commander - General of the Army I.D. Chernyakhovsky, from February 20, Marshal A .M. Vasilevsky) and the 2nd Belorussian (commander - Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky) with the participation of the Baltic Fleet (commander - Vice Admiral V.F. Tributs). They included more than 1,670 thousand people, 3,300 tanks and self-propelled guns, about 3,000 aircraft, 28,360 guns and mortars. The Red Army was opposed here by the troops of the German Army Group Center (later renamed the North Group) under the command of Colonel General L. Rendulich. The army group included about 580 thousand soldiers and officers, more than 200 thousand.

540

militias, more than 700 tanks, 775 aircraft, 8,200 guns and mortars!. Despite the overwhelming superiority of the Soviet troops, the operation turned out to be very difficult and bloody. The territory of East Prussia was densely saturated with fortifications and well prepared for defense. From the sea, the German grouping was supported and supported by a powerful grouping of warships. The Soviet Baltic Fleet was unable to block the enemy troops from the sea, and the Germans continued to supply and transfer their troops by sea until the very end of the operation without any special interference. The brightest page of the East Prussian operation was the assault on Koenigsberg. The most powerful fortress in East Prussia was taken by storm in just three days. On April 9, the garrison capitulated. Together with the commandant of the fortress, General O. Lash, 93,853 soldiers and officers surrendered. About 42 thousand German soldiers of the fortress garrison died during the assault. In total, during the fighting in East Prussia, the Red Army destroyed 25 German divisions, the other 12 divisions lost from 50 to 70% of their composition. Soviet troops captured more than 220 thousand soldiers and officials

ceres. About 15,000 guns and mortars, 1,442 tanks and assault guns, 363 combat aircraft, and many other "military equipment" became trophies.

The East Prussian operation turned out to be one of the bloodiest for the Red Army. The total losses of the Soviet fronts and fleet from January 13 to April 25 amounted to 584,778 soldiers and officers, of which 126,464 died, died of wounds and went missing. During the operation, a huge amount of military equipment was lost - 3,525 tanks and self-propelled guns, 1,450 combat aircraft and | 644 guns and mortars?.

Operations. on the flanks of the main direction created the basis for a new attack on Berlin, and the command of the Red Army again returned to the previous plan to cover the German

1 See: Vasilevsky A.M. Decree. op. S. 175. 2 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 3. pp. 248, 250. 3 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the 20th century... pp. 304, 486.

541

the capital by the forces of two fronts - the 1st Belorussian and the 1st Ukrainian. Front Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky was supposed to cover the troops of Marshal Zhukov from the north.

Last assault. The Berlin operation became the final chord of the Great Patriotic War. Both sides attached decisive importance to it. Hitler and his entourage were still hoping to achieve some kind of turning point in the war, and for them the defense of Berlin became a sort of last resort. In the event of a successful repulse of the expected Soviet offensive, the military-political leadership of the Third Reich hoped to persuade the allies of the USSR to start separate negotiations, attempts of which had already been repeatedly made by that time. For the Soviet leadership, the capture of Berlin from the very beginning acquired the most important political aspect. Already when discussing the plan of the operation at Headquarters with the commanders of the fronts, Stalin emphasized that, despite the agreement with the allies that Berlin was in the zone of Soviet occupation, the allied command was taking measures to capture it. at

From the memoirs of Marshal G.K. Zhukov:

"Then he [Stalin] went to the desk, leafed through some papers and took out a letter.

- Here, read it.

The letter was from one of the foreign well-wishers. It reported on behind-the-scenes negotiations between Hitler's agents and official representatives of the Allies, from which it became clear that the Germans were offering the Allies an end to

fight against them if they agree to a separate peace on any terms ... the possibility of the Germans opening the way for the Allied forces to Berlin was not ruled out. |

- Well, what do you say about it? asked I.V. Stalin. And without waiting for an answer, he immediately remarked:

- I think Roosevelt will not violate the Yalta agreement, but here is Churchill, this one can do anything!

1 Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. S. 221.

542

From the memoirs of Marshal I.S. Konev:

"On April 1, 1945, the commander of the 1st Belorussian Front, Marshal of the Soviet Union G.K. Zhukov and me...

As soon as we had time to say hello, Stalin asked a question:

Do you know how the situation is developing?

Zhukov and I replied that, according to the data available. we assume at our fronts, the situation is known to us.

Stalin turned to Shtemenko and told him:

- Read the telegram to them.

Shtemenko read aloud the telegram, the essence of which was briefly as follows: the Anglo-American command is preparing an operation to capture Berlin, setting the task of capturing it before the Soviet Army ... The telegram ended with the fact that, according to all data, the plan to capture Berlin before The Veteran Army is considered at the headquarters of the allies as quite real and preparations for its implementation are in full swing ...

Stalin turned to Zhukov and me:

- So who will take Berlin, we or the allies?

It so happened that I was the first to answer this question,  
ya replied:

- We will take Berlin, and we will take it before the allies of the KOV ... 1.

The war was still going on, and England and the USA were still allies, but stereotypes of confrontation and rivalry were already being planted in the minds of the Soviet leaders. The political aspect began to dominate more and more in the solution of combat missions. Wanting to speed up the capture of Berlin, Stalin used another trick.

From the memoirs of Marshal I.S. Konev:

"According to the original project, Berlin was supposed to take the 1st Belorussian Front. However, the right wing of the 1st Ukrainian Front, on which the main shock group was concentrated, passed in the immediate vicinity of Berlin, to the south of it ... Stalin began to mark with a pencil on the map

1 Konev I.S. Decree. op. pp. 299-300.

543

a narrow line between the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian fronts ... Drawing this line with a pencil, Stalin suddenly cut it off at the city of Lübben, located about 60 kilometers southeast of Berlin. Broke off and did not lead further ...

Was there an unspoken call for a competition of fronts in this cliff of the dividing line on Lübben?

Mention, and imagine what Berlin was then for us and what a passionate desire everyone, from a soldier to a general, experienced, to see this city with their own eyes, to master it with the power of their weapons. Of course, this was also my passionate desire..."!

As a result, the Berlin operation was to be carried out with the coordinated efforts of three fronts - the 1st and 2nd Belorussian and the 1st Ukrainian. On the side of the Red Army was an overwhelming numerical superiority. The troops of the three fronts numbered more than 2.5 million soldiers and officers, 6,250 tanks and self-propelled guns, more than 7,500 aircraft, and about 41,600 guns and mortars. The enemy could oppose them with about 1 million people, 1,500 tanks and assault guns, 3,300 aircraft, 10,400 guns?.

The task of a direct assault on the German capital was assigned to the 1st Belorussian Front. Stalin remained true to his original idea - Berlin should take Zhukov! Marshal Zhukov had a great honor, any commander dreamed of being in his place. The commander of the 1st Belorus-

, the front was fully aware of the complexity of the before his troops tasks. "During the entire war, I had to be a direct participant in many large and important offensive operations," wrote G.K. Zhukov, - but the upcoming battle for Berlin was special, incomparable to my operation. The troops of the front had to break through a continuous echeloned zone of powerful defensive lines, starting from the Oder itself and ending with heavily fortified Berlin. The successful organization of the defense of Berlin was greatly facilitated by the heavily rugged, sometimes swampy

3 Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. pp. 225-296.

544

a rich area on its eastern approaches, replete with rivers, lakes, ravines and hills. The shortest route to Berlin was closed by the Seelow Heights, which were practically impassable for tanks. Throughout the entire space - from the Oder to Berlin - three lines of defense were created, saturated with numerous reinforced concrete and wood-and-earth fortifications. The city itself was practically turned into a fortress - all large buildings were turned into strongholds, streets and squares were blocked by powerful barricades. Everything that could be used was included in the general defense system - the numerous anti-aircraft artillery of Berlin was put on direct fire, the tanks and assault guns that were being repaired were turned into fixed firing points. As one of the participants in the storming of Berlin recalled, both the city and its approaches were a "solid defense zone".

The troops of Marshal Zhukov faced a difficult and bloody operation. But the commander himself was optimistic: "... the work carried out to prepare the Berlin operation was unprecedented in scope and tension. In a relatively narrow sector of the 1st Belorussian Front, 77 rifle divisions, 3,155 tanks and self-propelled guns, 14,628 guns and mortars, and 1,531 rocket artillery installations were concentrated in a short time. We were sure that with these means and forces our troops would defeat the enemy in the shortest possible time. The enemy deployed 14 divisions directly against Zhukov's troops. The directive of the Headquarters provided for breaking through the enemy defenses with the forces of four combined arms armies and, having introduced two tank armies into the gap, send them around Berlin from the north and northeast. To solve the task set by Stalin - to capture Berlin before the Allies - it was enough to bypass the city from the north and, joining with the troops of Marshal Konev, close the encirclement. After that, it was possible to prepare his assault, using all the available opportunities.

But Marshal Zhukov preferred the option of a breakthrough along the shortest

b Katukov M.E. Decree. op. P. 391. Zhukov  
G.K. Decree. op. pp. 233-234.

18 A. Kilichenkov 545

our way. To do this, it was necessary to overcome over 60 km of solid defensive structures, which were defended by an experienced and fanatical enemy. The main thing was that the conditions of the terrain completely ruled out a wide maneuver of the front's strike force - the tank armies. There was only one thing left - the slow "gnawing" of the enemy's defenses, and this meant inevitable and numerous losses. And their weight is a hundredfold



intensified by the awareness of the proximity of victory and the end of the war. Nevertheless, Marshal Zhukov preferred this particular course of action. To fully guarantee a successful breakthrough of the enemy's defenses, the front command provided for the possibility of using both tank armies to break into the enemy's defenses. This decision completely contradicted all available experience, which showed that such powerful and mobile operational formations as a tank army could best of all realize their potential, operating in the operational rear of the enemy, after breaking through his defenses. In the course of the forthcoming assault on the defense in depth, tank armies simply could not realize their full potential and were doomed to heavy losses. Some commanders defended whether it was expedient to use tank armies for maneuver. At a meeting at the front headquarters in early April 1945, the commander of the 2nd Guards Tank Army, General S.I. Bogdanov tried to prove the need for a wide maneuver of the tank army to cover Berlin from the north, but Marshal Zhukov sharply reprimanded him: "Are you going to fight for Berlin, comrade Bogdanov, or will you always leave to the north?"

The choice of the front commander was dictated by other considerations: "We decided to fall on the defending enemy troops with such force as to immediately stun and shake them to the ground, bringing down aircraft, tanks, artillery and other types of weapons on them ...> . It was a bet on the suppression of the enemy with its power, in fact, a demonstration of strength, which was based on the consciousness of one's superiority over the enemy.

' Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. P.228.  
? Quoted from: Babajanyan A.Kh. Roads of Victory. - M.: Military Publishing House, 1981.S. 281.  
Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. S. 232.

546

GOM. "... we had no doubts," later admitted the commander of the 1st Guards Tank Army, M.E. Katukov - that in any case we will sweep away all the enemy fortifications covering the approaches to the capital. And this confidence was based on the victories that the Soviet troops won in past battles.

In order to achieve complete suppression of the enemy defenses, the front command decided to launch the offensive late at night in the light of powerful anti-aircraft searchlights. It was assumed that this technique would have a powerful mental effect on the enemy and make it difficult to conduct aimed fire. Participants in the exercises held the day before admitted that the spectacle was indeed very spectacular.

The headquarters hurried the troops, and the date of the attack on Berlin by the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian fronts was set for April 16th. The front of Marshal Rokossovsky did not keep up with this deadline. This created additional difficulties for the attackers. "Of course," Marshal G.K. admitted after the war. Zhukov, it would be better to wait five or six days and start

The Berlin operation simultaneously with three fronts, but ... given the current military-political situation, the Headquarters could not postpone the operation until a later time. Stalin was determined to take Berlin by storm before the Allies approached.

The offensive of the troops of the 1st Belorussian Front began exactly according to plan on April 16. Early in the morning, two hours before dawn, the most powerful artillery fire fell on the German positions - an average of up to 300 guns and mortars per 1 km of the breakthrough area. After a half-hour artillery preparation, "thousands of multi-colored rockets soared into the air. At this signal, 140 searchlights flashed, located every 200 meters. More than 100 billion candles illuminated the battlefield, blinding the enemy and snatching objects of attack from the darkness for our tanks and infantry. This was a picture of great impressive power, and, perhaps, in my whole life I do not remember such a spectacle! .. -

1 Katukov M.E. Decree. op. S. 391. ? Zhukov  
G.K. Decree. op. S. 225.

547

marshal G.K. Zhukov. - Hitler's troops were literally sunk in a sea of fire and metal. A solid wall of dust and smoke hung in the air, and in some places even the powerful beams of anti-aircraft searchlights could not penetrate it, but this did not bother anyone ... ". And although the calculation of the use of such an unusual means did not justify itself, but the units of the 8th Guards Army of General V.I. Chuikov managed to capture the first line of defense. However, further advance was stopped at the second line, passing through the Seelow Heights. The repeated infantry attack yielded nothing. And then the commander of the front threw both of his tank armies to the heights, promising Stalin to break through the defenses the next day.

Front Marshal I.S. Koneva began his offensive on the same day. Under the cover of a giant smoke screen, the troops quickly crossed the river. Neisse and made a hole in the enemy's defense. After that, the 3rd and 4th Guards Tank Armies under the command of Generals P.S. Ry Balko and D.D. Lelyushenko. The transition of the tank armies to the offensive after the breakthrough had already been secured gave them a great advantage. Picking up speed, the tank brigades rushed deep into the enemy defenses, preventing the enemy's reserves from preparing to repel the attack. German units entered the battle on the move, and often found themselves caught and destroyed on the march. On the second day of the offensive, the second and third lines of defense were broken through. On the third day, the tankers managed to force the river on the move. Spree on the shoulders of the retreating enemy and begin a rapid advance around Berlin from the south.

On the same day, Stalin ordered Marshal Konev to turn

.push both tank armies to Berlin. In his directive to the tanks, the front commander demanded pressure and speed of action: "In the main direction with a tank fist, it is bolder and more resolute to break forward. Cities and large settlements to bypass and not get involved in protracted frontal

1 Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. S. 240.

new fights. I demand a firm understanding that the success of tank armies depends on bold maneuver and swiftness in action.

The reason for this turn was the difficulties of the 1st Belorussian Front in breaking through the Seelow Heights. Zhukov's troops were unable to break through the defenses even after tank armies entered the battle. The mistake made by the front command in planning the operation became obvious - the main line in the enemy's defense turned out to be not the first zone, on which all the power of artillery and aviation of the front was brought down, but the second one, which passed along the heights. This was pointed out to the commander by some participants in the meetings of the commanding staff in the process of preparing the operation, but their opinion was not taken into account? Now I had to pay for the mistakes of planning

vanity.

From the memoirs of Marshal G.K. Zhukov:

"In the evening, I again reported to the Supreme Commander about the difficulties on the approaches to the Seelow Heights and said that it would not be possible to take this line before tomorrow evening.

This time, Stalin spoke to me not as calmly as during the day:

"You shouldn't have brought the 1st Guards Tank Army into action in the sector of the 8th Guards Army, and not where the Stavka demanded," he said sharply and added:

- Do you have confidence that tomorrow you will take the Zeel line?

Trying to be calm, I answered:

- Tomorrow, April 17, by the end of the day, the defenses on the Seelow line will be broken through. I believe that the more the enemy throws his troops towards our troops here, the faster we will then take Berlin, since it is easier to defeat enemy troops in an open field than in a city.

- We are thinking of ordering Konev to move the tank armies of Rybalko and Lelyushenko to Berlin from the south, and Rokossovsky

1 Cited. by: Konev I.S. Decree. op. S. 329. ? See:  
Babajanyan A.Kh. Decree. op. S. 282.

549

to force the crossing and also strike around Berlin from the north, - said I.V. Stalin.

I answered:

- Konev's tank armies have every opportunity to move quickly, and they should be sent to Berlin, and Rokossovsky will not be able to launch an offensive before April 23, as he will be delayed in forcing the Oder.

"Goodbye," I.V. said rather dryly. Stalin hung up instead of answering.

My mood was unimportant. But I knew I.V. Stalin: even when the little things did not go well, he was very annoyed.

— Stalin was clearly trying to play on the pride of Marshal Zhukov by organizing a kind of "competition" of fronts to take Berlin. On April 17-18, Konev's tanks, picking up speed, rapidly approached Berlin, making 30-50 km marches, Zhukov's tank armies "literally dug the enemy out of deep trenches and trenches." The battles for the Seelow line continued until April 19, the tankers suffered heavy losses. But the front command strictly demanded to continue on

step.

From the memoirs of Marshal of the Armored Forces A.Kh. Babad Janyana:

"... IN THE NIGHT On April 18, when the second enemy defense line had already been broken through and our troops continued the offensive, General N.I. Gerko, saying that I needed to go with him back to the city of Zeelov, to a meeting with a member of the Military Council of the Front, K.F. Telegin.

- Now?!

- This minute.

I was perplexed: in the midst of repelling the enemy's frenzied counterattacks, abandon our troops and go somewhere to a meeting?

... They hardly found the miraculously preserved house where the meeting was held. The flickering light of the oil lamp illuminated the faces of those assembled. In the middle at the table I recognized K.F. Telegin, his face was stern, but it was felt that he was very upset. By last

1 Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. pp. 242-243.

550

him to the phrases of those present, we. with N.I. Gerko realized that there was a "analysis" of the delay in the offensive at the Seelow Heights. I knew Konstantin Fedorovich since the autumn of forty-two. There were difficult times, but Telegin always remained for me a model of party integrity, emphasized correctness ... And suddenly ... It was not otherwise - and Konstantin Fyodorovich was hard hit for the delay at the Seelow Heights ...

He noted to himself that among the commanders standing in front of a member of the Military Council, the majority were tankmen. It seems like the tankers are to blame for the fact that they were not provided with room for action!

On April 20, when the Zeelovsky line was finally overcome, Zhukov sent a radiogram to General M.E. Katukov: "The 1st Guards Tank Army is entrusted with a historic task - to be the first to break into Berlin and hoist the Banner of Victory. You are personally instructed to organize the execution. Send one of the best brigades from each corps to Berlin and set them the task of breaking through to the outskirts of Berlin at any cost no later than 4 am 21.4. On the same day, Marshal Konev also issued an order to his tank armies: "Personally to Comrades Rybalko and Lelya Shenko. The troops of Marshal Zhukov are ten kilometers from the eastern outskirts of Berlin ... I am ordering, without fail, today, but whose to break into Berlin ... The execution is to be conveyed "3. Another "competition" began - this time for the right to be the first to raise the Victory Banner in the center of Berlin.

On April 20, the 2nd Belorussian Front went on the offensive. In the Berlin operation, his general task was to cover the right flank of Marshal Zhukov's front. The final operation of Marshal Rokossovsky turned out to be one of the most difficult. Fronteché did not complete the East Pomeranian operation, and he was given the task of launching a new offensive.

'Babajanyan A.Kh. Decree. op. pp. 283-284.

? Katukov M.E. Decree. op. S. 401.

3 Lelyushenko D.D. Moscow - Stalingrad - Berlin - Prague. Notes of the commander. - M.: Nauka, 1985. S. 340. It is interesting to note that neither Zhukov nor Konev in their memoirs cite the text of these radiograms and do not even mention the very fact of the transmission of these orders, bypassing in complete silence the question of the "competition" of the fronts in a breakthrough to Berlin.

551

leniya. To do this, it was necessary to transfer troops over a distance of more than 300 km and prepare to overcome such a powerful obstacle as the Oder in its lower reaches. The conditions for forcing the river were extremely complicated by the fact that in the area of the breakthrough the river was divided into two branches, and the space between them, five kilometers wide, was flooded. In itself, the task of crossing such an obstacle was unbelievable.

obviously difficult, and according to the directive of the Headquarters, it was necessary to cross the section between the fortresses Stettin and Schwedt, where the most powerful German group was located. A lengthy and thorough preparation of the operation was required, but the Headquarters demanded that operations be started four days earlier than the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian fronts. Rokossovsky was hardly able to convince the Headquarters to increase the preparation time, but the front could not get additional vehicles to speed up the transfer of troops.

Under these conditions, the military talent of Konstantin Konstantinovich Rokossovsky was fully manifested. Marshal managed to organize the simultaneous transfer of troops and their preparation for crossing the Oder. Rokossovsky has always been distinguished by the ability to create conditions for the maximum realization of the potential of his subordinates, and this time it gave its results. By that time, commanders of all levels had gained invaluable experience in combat operations, incl. and forcing rivers under enemy fire, and managed to apply it. On the eve of the offensive, special assault groups managed to capture the remains of destroyed dams, which were then used as intermediate lines in forcing the floodplain of the river. On the morning of April 20, three armies of the 2nd Belorussian Front immediately began crossing the Oder, their forward detachments managed to capture several bridgeheads, and the rest depended on the work of army sappers. "We happened to observe the work of sappers," recalled Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky. - Working up to their necks in icy water among the explosions of shells and mines, they built a crossing. Every second they were threatened with death, but people understood their soldier's duty and thought of one thing - to help their comrades on the west bank and thereby bring victory closer. Duty

552

For them was above all!"! The battles for the bridgeheads on the western bank of the Oder lasted four days, only by the evening of April 25 did they manage to break through the enemy defenses. After that, Rokossovsky's troops began a deep envelopment of the 3rd German Panzer Army that opposed them, trying to press it to the coast and exclude the possibility of inflicting a flank attack on the armies of the 1st Belorussian Front, which closed the ring around Berlin from the north.

On April 21, fighting began on the outer defensive contour of Berlin. Troops of the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian fronts continued to storm the city and at the same time bypassed it from the south and north. On April 24, the advanced units of the tank armies of Katukov and Rybalko united on the southeastern outskirts of Berlin, completing the dissection of the German group. The main forces of the German 9th Army and part of the forces of the 4th Panzer Army were cut off from Berlin and surrounded southeast of the city. And on April 25, the troops of the two fronts closed the encirclement ring west of Berlin. It was very symbolic that on the same day the advanced units of the 1st Ukrainian Front in the Torgau region met with a reconnaissance detachment of the 1st American Army.

The liquidation of the encircled groupings of the German army for-

lasted until the beginning of May. On April 21, Hitler abandoned his original intention to fly to South Germany, from where he intended to lead the fight further. The Fuhrer decided to stay in the capital, believing that this would strengthen the garrison's resolve to win or die. The latest plan of the German command provided for the actual abandonment of the fight on the western front and the turn of all remaining forces to the defense of Berlin. The 12th Army of General V. Wenck received an order to leave their positions on the river. Elbe and hastily move east, she had to release the troops of the 9th and 4th tank armies surrounded southeast of Berlin, and then jointly break through to the Berlin garrison. The plan was fraught with a serious threat to the troops of Zhukov and Konev, since their main striking forces - tank armies - were already involved in the most difficult urban battles, and as part of only an encircled group

1 Rokossovsky K.K. Decree. op. S. 421.

553

feast of General T. Busse, there were up to 200 thousand soldiers and officers, more than 300 tanks, about 2,000 guns and mortars.

The complexity of the situation for the Soviet troops was aggravated by the fact that the fronts were still coordinated by the Supreme Commander I.V. Stalin, who remained in the Kremlin, which made it difficult to resolve a number of issues. The 1st Ukrainian Front found itself in the most difficult situation, whose troops had to act simultaneously in four directions - to repel the offensive from the west of the German 12th Army and attempts to break through the 9th Army from the east, to hold the defense in the south, fending off a counterattack by another enemy groupings, and, most importantly, to continue the assault on Berlin. But it was under these conditions that Marshal I.S. Konev, his troops were able to successfully solve all these problems. By that time, the commanders of the Red Army had accumulated sufficient experience in liquidating encircled enemy forces, effectively using aviation and tank formations of the front to repel attempts by the encircled grouping to break out of the encirclement. | May troops of General T. Busse ceased resistance. About 120 thousand soldiers and officers were taken prisoner, more than 60 thousand were destroyed during the fighting. The 12th army of General Wenck was never able to break through to the encircled, although at the last moment they were separated by only about 30 km.

All this time in Berlin, day and night, there were battles. In total, the capital of the Reich was defended by up to 300 thousand people, 250 tanks, 3,000 guns. To storm the German capital, Marshals Konev and Zhukov were able to concentrate over 470 thousand soldiers and officers, 1,500 tanks and self-propelled guns, more than 2,000 aircraft, 14,800 guns and mortars. The Soviet troops had an overwhelming superiority in technology, but the conditions of battle in urban areas made it difficult to realize this superiority. By that time, large numbers of hand-held anti-tank grenade launchers (Faustpatron, Panzerschreck, etc.) were adopted by Wehrmacht and militia units (Volkssturm). They had range

actions of only 30-150 meters, but were able to penetrate armor up to 200 mm thick, which allowed them to hit any armored vehicles of the Red Army. Cheap to manufacture and about

554

easy-to-use faustpatrons became a massive anti-tank weapon of the German army and a real scourge of the Soviet tank troops - losses from faustpatrons reached half of all losses of tanks and self-propelled guns. The conditions for the operation of aviation were very difficult. Dense urban development, the constant smoke of streets and squares, the absence of a permanent front line and the rapid movement of units - all this made it extremely difficult to identify targets and often became the cause of erroneous strikes against friendly troops. As a result, artillery remained the main firepower - a faithful and reliable means of support, helping out its infantry throughout the long years of the war. The main method of its application was direct aiming, on which almost all guns with a caliber from 45 to 203 mm were placed. Direct fire inevitably led to heavy losses among gun crews. But, of course, the most difficult battle lay ahead of the infantry, on their shoulders lay the task of fighting for every street, square, every house, every meter. It was her blood that was poured abundantly on the last path to Victory. .. ,

The struggle in Berlin reached its highest bitterness already in the first days. By the time of the encirclement, the city ran out of coal reserves, there was no electricity, enterprises, transport, metro, water supply and sewerage stopped working. The capture by the Red Army of the main food warehouses on the outskirts of the capital put the population of the city under the threat of starvation. Incessant Soviet air raids and heavy artillery fire turned the city into ruins. But the German garrison continued to fight with the stubbornness and desperation of the doomed, its fighting spirit remained exceptionally high to the very highest. th last hour. According to the recollections of the participants, the battle for Berlin acquired the features of a universal battle: the roar of bombs and shells merged into an incessant roar, clubs of flame and flashes of fire closed the city, streets and squares were cluttered with broken and burning equipment. The deafening shots of guns, bursts of machine guns did not stop for a minute. Fierce battles went on for every house, every floor, every now and then in the subway tunnels, in sewer pipes, underground passages

555

hand-to-hand fights. The advance of the Red Army units to the city center was no longer measured in kilometers, but in tens of meters.

In the last days of the storming of Berlin, another "competition" flared up between units and formations of the two fronts for the right to be the first to hoist the Victory Banner over the Reichstag. From the north and southeast, the troops of the 1st Be-



Lorussian front: 3rd shock army of Colonel-General V.I. Kuznetsov, 8th Guards Army Colonel General V.I. Chuikov and the 1st Guards Tank Army, Colonel General M.E. Katukov. From the south, units of the 3rd Guards Tank Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front, Colonel General P.S. Rybalko.

The 3rd shock army was the first to break through to the Reichstag on the night of April 29. Upon learning of the appearance of Soviet troops in the center of the capital, Hitler committed suicide. On the morning of the 30th, the assault on the German parliament building began, but it was repulsed. At noon, a second attack followed. At two o'clock in the afternoon at the headquarters of the army, and then at the headquarters of the front, they received good news - the Banner of Victory over the Reichstag. But it soon became clear that this information was premature - it was not possible to break into the Reichstag. Another assault soon followed, and then another. The first Soviet flag was hoisted over the Reichstag only at about 11 pm on April 30 by a group of Captain V.N. Makov. A little later, a red banner appeared above the dome, raised by sergeants M.A. Egorov and M.V. Kantaria, it was he who became the official Banner of Victory, which is stored to this day in the Central Museum of the Armed Forces of Russia.

The resistance of the isolated groups continued for two more days. On the morning of May 2, the commander of the Berlin defense, General G. Weidling, surrendered, on his orders 134,700 soldiers and officers capitulated. Berlin has fallen.

The completion of the Berlin operation was a triumph for the Red Army - none of the operations of the Great Patriotic War had such impressive results. With the combined efforts of the 1st and 2nd Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian fronts, 93 German divisions were defeated, about 480 thousand soldiers were captured.

556

prisoners, more than 1,500 tanks and assault guns, 4,500 aircraft, up to 11,000 guns and mortars. During the operation, the Red Army troops surrounded the largest enemy grouping in the entire war - over half a million soldiers and officers. It took only seven days to destroy the encircled enemy forces. The operation to destroy the 300,000-strong F. Paulus group near Stalingrad took more than two months. The combat skill of the commanders of the Red Army has increased many times over. "In the fourth year of the war, the performance of such combat missions was taken for granted," wrote Marshal I.S. Konev, "which, if they were mentally transferred to the first period of the war, would be considered incredibly difficult, standing on the verge of the impossible"<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, both the idea and the course of the operation raised many questions and disputes among the participants. This was caused by very large losses of the Soviet troops. During the operation, the troops of the three fronts and with the forces given to them lost 352,475 soldiers and officers, 78,291 people died and died from wounds. 1,997 tanks and self-propelled guns, 917 combat aircraft, 2,108 guns and mortars were lost. In terms of the average daily loss of personnel - 15,325 dead and wounded - the Berlin operation turned out to be comparable

VIM with the defeats of the Red Army in 1941-1942. The same "level of losses is typical for military equipment - an average of 87 tanks, 40 combat aircraft, 92 guns and mortars" were lost per day.

For the final operation of the war, when the Red Army was at the peak of its power, and its command staff really accumulated colossal experience in organizing and conducting large-scale offensive operations, such a level of losses required explanation. The main reason was the plan and organization of the troops. This was later recognized by Marshal G.K. Zhukov: <... thinking about the plan of the Berlin operation, I came to the conclusion that the defeat of the Berlin group

1 See: History of the Second World War, 1939-1945. T. 10. M.: Military Publishing House, 1979. S. 344.

? Konev I.S. Decree. op. S. 321.

3 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century...S. 307, 487.

557

the enemy's attacks and the capture of Berlin itself were done correctly, but this operation could have been carried out in a slightly different way. Marshal believed that the operation to take Berlin from the very beginning should have been carried out by two fronts at once - the 1st Belorussian and the 1st Ukrainian. At the same time, they were supposed to strike around the German capital from the north and south. The offensive sector of the 2nd Belorussian Front had to be moved south, eliminating the need to force the Oder in the lower reaches. "For a number of reasons, primarily of a subjective nature," Zhukov later explained, "when the plan was considered and approved, the Headquarters did not include these options. The Supreme High Command put into practice the variant of a strike on a broad front. For Headquarters it was somewhat simpler, but from the point of view of operational-strategic art, it was not original enough, and, consequently, less effective. At the same time, Marshal Zhukov did not question the "political aspect" of this operation - the need for the speedy capture of Berlin before the approach of the allied armies.

The culminating moment of the operation - the breakthrough through the Zeelovsky Heights - caused the greatest controversy among the participants, primarily tankers. The commander of one of the tank corps of the 1st Guards Tank Army A.Kh. Babadzhanian believed that "in the Berlin operation, the 1st Guards Tank Army was, alas, not used in the best way. Its direct introduction into a breakthrough, a blow to the forehead of the enemy's defense, when, together with the combined arms armies, together with the infantry, they attack the enemy's defensive lines one after another - all this does not correspond to the real purpose of large tank formations ... ". G.K. Zhukov, referring to the issue of breaking through the Zeelovsky frontier, did not recognize the fallacy of this decision: "There were no mistakes. However, it must be recognized that we

an oversight was made, which dragged out the battle during the breakthrough of the tactical zone for one or two days. In preparing the operation, we somewhat underestimated the complexity of the nature of the

' Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. pp. 245-246. ?  
Babajanyan A.Kh. Decree. op. S. 294.

558

in the area of the Seelow Heights, where the enemy had the opportunity to organize an insurmountable defense ... True, we had an extremely limited time to prepare the Berlin operation, but this cannot serve as an excuse ... First of all, I must blame for the lack of a question take over..."

And yet it is difficult to recognize this as an oversight. In the same place, in his memoirs, Marshal Zhukov, when describing the operation, emphasized the thoroughness of its preparation, especially highlighting the reconnaissance actions: aviation surveyed the area six times, which made it possible, along with trophy documents and materials from interviews of prisoners, to prepare detailed plans and maps, and even a layout of the city with suburbs. "The curtain moved back," recalled one of the participants in the meeting at the headquarters of the front, "and before us appeared a map, all dotted with spots of lakes, streaks of irrigation facilities. The lines of German defense were clearly marked - from the Oder to the Seelow Heights ... Here the second curtain was pulled back - the relief map of Berlin was opened. Everything was on it: streets, houses, fortifications, blockages, pillboxes, even quarters destroyed by bombing were depicted ... It was a real masterpiece of cartography»>?.

It seems that the "oversight" was something else - Zhukov and his headquarters, intending to demonstrate the power of the Red Army, clearly overestimated their strength and capabilities, deciding to break through the German defenses in its strongest place. Thousands upon thousands of soldiers' lives were the price of this completely unnecessary and failed demonstration.

Another reason for the obviously excessive losses was the regular blunders of the Headquarters. True to his "pushing head on" manner, Stalin initiated a "competition" between front commanders in the capture of Berlin, instead of fulfilling his main function of coordinating the actions of the fronts. The direct result of this "management" was competition instead of coordination. The spirit of competitiveness, perhaps quite appropriate somewhere in civilian life, in a war environment led to the adoption of inadequate

} Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. pp. 244-245. ?  
Babajanyan A.Kh. Decree. op. S. 280.

559

well-thought-out decisions, like the assault on the Seelow Heights by tank armies and orders "by all means" to be the first to break into Berlin, the first to hoist the Banner of Victory. And, most importantly, comrades-in-arms and comrades-in-arms turned into rivals, and now the appearance of the troops of the neighboring front caused no longer joy and relief, but rather hostility. "Why are you here?!" - with these words, Marshal Zhukov met General Rybalko when his tankers went to the Reichstag on the last day of the storming of Berlin! Stalin's idea of "competitive

niya" was complicated by a number of organizational miscalculations of the General Staff, which was two days late with the establishment of the demarcation line of the areas of operation of the fronts and failed to ensure a clear interaction between their formations in the city. As a result, units and subunits of different fronts, rushing to the city center at all costs, mixed up. Front-line aviation, and sometimes artillery, often struck at their own. It is bitter to die in the last days of the war, but to bend at the hands of one's own is a hundredfold more bitter! Tankers of the 1st Ukrainian Front, breaking through to the Reichstag, instead of joining the advanced units of the 8th Guards Army, went to its rear, which could lead to unpredictable consequences. Both front commanders urgently turned to Stalin with a request to establish a new dividing line. As a result, Konev had to withdraw his tank units back.

There is no doubt that after the abolition of the institution of representatives of the Headquarters and the complete concentration of all control over the actions of the fronts in the hands of Stalin, political motives began to dominate over military priorities. For the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, the political results of certain military decisions were much more important than the actual military expediency. The question of the "price of victory", when there were only a few steps to it, was not even considered. The allied command demonstrated the exact opposite approach these days.

By the beginning of May, most of the hostilities in Germany were completed. Allied troops and Red Ar

1 See: Konev I.S. Decree. op. S. 504.

mission reached the line of contact along the river. Elbe. The final operation of World War II in Europe was the liberation of Czechoslovakia, in which politics once again intervened. By that time, the desire of the German command to withdraw as many troops as possible to the west with the aim of surrendering to the British and American troops was fully manifested. In Czechoslovakia, the most significant grouping of German troops remained under the command of Field Marshal F. Scherner. It consisted of about 900 thousand people, 1900 tanks, about 1000 aircraft, 9700 guns and mortars. The commander set before his troops the task of breaking through to the west. But on his way was the rebellious Prague.

The uprising began in various regions of Czechoslovakia as early as early May. The forces of the rebels were insignificant, there were not enough weapons, there was no single control center, there was no connection with the command of the Red Army. On May 5, an uprising broke out in Prague. Scherner ordered the suppression of the uprising, tanks and aircraft were thrown into Prague, German troops captured part of it. cities. The fate of the rebellious citizens of Prague seemed a foregone conclusion, but unexpectedly, the commander of the 1st division of the Russian Liberation Army (ROA), S. Bunyachenko, turned to them with an offer of help. The ROA, formed by General A. Vlasov, at that time retreated to the west, trying to avoid being captured by Soviet troops. Bunyachenko and the officers of his division counted on political asylum in Czechoslovakia after its liberation by the American army. The help of the Vlasovites was most welcome. The appearance of a complete and equipped division in Prague made a turning point in the course of the struggle, the western districts of the city were liberated from German troops. However, the next day, the leaders of the uprising, fearing the complication of relations with Moscow, refused to help the [th division of the ROA. Bunyachenko, finding out that American troops were not planning to capture Prague, left the city and moved west. On May 7, the situation again became critical, and now all the hopes of the rebels were connected with the Red Army. On May 8, formations of the 1st Ukrainian Front broke through the passes of the Ore Mountains and rushed to Prague. Troops of the 2nd and 4th Ukrainian fronts advanced from the east and southeast. Together with the Soviet units, formations of Polish, Romanian and Czechos acted.

561

Slovak troops. On the night of May 9, tanks of the 3rd and 4th Guards Tank Armies broke into Prague. The city was liberated. Scherner's group capitulated.

The Prague operation, in terms of the number of losses, became one of the most effective operations of the Red Army. In captivity. 860 thousand enemy soldiers and officers were taken, 1,800 tanks, more than 1,000 aircraft, 9,500 guns and mortars were captured. The losses of the Red Army amounted to 49,348 people, of which 11,265 were irrecoverable, 373 tanks, 80 aircraft, 1,006 guns and mortars! The liquidation of the last grouping of the Wehrmacht in Europe coincided with the signing of the Act of General Surrender of the German Armed Forces, which took place on May 8 in the Berlin suburb of Karlshorst. From the Soviet side, the Act was signed by Deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief Marshal G.K. Zhukov, on behalf of the command of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe - Air Chief Marshal of Great Britain A. Tedder, as witnesses, the US representative, Commander of the Strategic Air Force, General C. Spaats, of France, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, General J.- M. de Lattre de Tassigny. The German side was represented by Field Marshal W. Keitel, Admiral G. Friedeburg and Colonel General of Aviation G. Stumpf. The act came into force on May 8 at 23:01. Between May 9 and 17, the remaining groupings of German troops capitulated or were captured, their number was 1,390,978 soldiers and officers, 101 generals. On

This ended World War II in Europe.

## REVENGE IN MANCHURIA

After the defeat of Germany, the Asia-Pacific remained the last theater of military operations. By May 1945, the combined forces of the allies came close to the outer defense perimeter of Japan. The question arose about the invasion of the Japanese islands, and this prospect was presented to the allied command

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book Z3. S. 294; Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 308,487.

562

very difficult, despite the colossal military superiority of England and the USA. Fighting during the campaigns of 1943-1945. showed against the Yanonian garrisons in the Pacific Islands; that the enemy resisted skillfully and fanatically, the expeditionary force suffered heavy losses. The impending invasion of the Japanese islands was bound to turn into a protracted and bloody campaign, and would entail heavy losses. By that time, the armed forces of Japan numbered up to 7.2 million people, and even 28 million were part of the militia. This prospect determined the extreme interest of the political leadership of England and the United States in the speedy entry of the USSR into the war with Japan.

The participation of the Soviet Union in the hostilities against Japan was a constant issue at conferences of heads of state, and this issue was resolved in principle during the Tehran Conference. During a meeting in Yalta in February 1945, an agreement was reached on the entry of the USSR into the war two or three months after the surrender of Germany. By that time, the neutrality pact between the USSR and Japan was still in force, but its effectiveness throughout the war was very relative. The Japanese armed forces carried out constant provocations on the border, Soviet merchant ships were searched more than 200 times by warships of the Imperial Japanese Navy, dozens of ships were forfeited, and eight drabbles were sunk. The protests of Soviet diplomats did not produce results. The main factor was the presence on the Soviet border of more than a million Japanese groups, which forced the command of the Red Army to keep up to 30% of all combat forces and means in the Far East: 59 calculated divisions, about 1 million soldiers and officers, 2000 tanks and self-propelled guns, 3 -4 thousand aircraft, 8-16 thousand guns and mortars! Needless to say, how necessary these divisions and this equipment were on the Soviet-German front, especially in 1941-1942.

But still, while the struggle with Germany continued, the USSR was still interested in neutrality, which allowed

' See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book Z3. S. 384.

563

concentrate the main efforts on the western front. After the defeat of Germany, other priorities came into force. The allies, who were extremely interested in the entry of the Soviet Union into the war, themselves invited Stalin to express their territorial claims. Upon learning of their content, US President F0. Roosevelt was struck by the "modesty of Stalin's Asiatic demands" and during the Yalta Conference promised Stalin to support them. The demands of the Soviet side were determined by the desire to take revenge for the defeat of Russia in the war of 1904-1905.

From the agreement of the heads of the USSR, USA, Great Britain, February 11, 1945:

"The leaders of the Three Great Powers — the Soviet Union, the United States of America and Great Britain — agreed that two or three months after the surrender of Germany

- the end of the war in Europe, the Soviet Union will enter the war against Japan on the side of the Allies, provided:

2. Restoration of the rights belonging to Russia, violated by the treacherous attack of Japan in 1904, namely:

a) the return to the Soviet Union of the southern part of about. Sakhalin and all adjacent islands;

6) the internationalization of the commercial port of Dairen, ensuring the predominant interests of the Soviet Union in this port and the restoration of the lease on Port Arthur as a naval base of the USSR;

3. Transfer to the Soviet Union of the Kuril Islands.

The Heads of the Governments of the Three Great Powers agreed that these claims of the Soviet Union must be unconditionally satisfied after the victory over Japan..."!

! The Soviet Union at international conferences during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945: Crimean Conference of the Leaders of the Three Allied Powers > USSR, USA and Great Britain February 4-11, 1945 - M., 1984. S. 254-255.

564

Shortly after the end of hostilities in Europe, the transfer of military formations of the Red Army to the Far East began, the means of logistics there

began to concentrate starting in February 1945. At the beginning of August, a gigantic in scale strategic regrouping of troops was completed. In total, over 403 thousand soldiers and officers, 2,119 tanks and self-propelled guns, 7,137 guns and mortars, 17,374 tires, 1,500 tractors and tractors, 36,000 horses were transported to the east for a distance of 12 thousand km! Emphasizing the scale of this unprecedented operation in history, Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky writes that at the same time in the period May-July 1945 there were up to a million Red Army servicemen on the railway lines of Siberia, Transbaikalia and the Far East? As a result of this redeployment, by the beginning of the war, a powerful grouping of troops was created as part of three fronts, the Pacific Fleet and the Amur Flotilla. It also included formations of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Army. In total, the grouping consisted of 1.7 million people, 5,200 tanks and self-propelled guns, 5,000 aircraft, about 30,000 guns and mortars, and 171 ships. The Kwantung grouping of the Japanese army opposing them had about 1 million soldiers and officers, 1,215 tanks, 1,907 aircraft, 6,640 guns, 26 ships.

On the side of the Red Army there was a solid superiority in manpower and overwhelming in technology, but it had to be realized in very difficult conditions. First of all, the Far East theater of military operations was enormous; in terms of total area, it surpassed Germany, Italy, and Japan combined. The total length of the border exceeded 5,000 km. The relief of the theater was extremely inconvenient for large-scale actions of large groups. The combination of mountainous, desert, taiga and swampy terrain with a large number of rivers and lakes led to the fact that large formations could operate only in certain areas, isolated

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book Z3. S. 388. ? Vasilevsky A.M. Decree. op. S. 246. 3 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 3.S. 387, 389.

565

from each other at a distance of several hundred kilometers. During the period of confrontation, the Japanese army succeeded in creating a huge network of various kinds of fortifications united in 17 fortified regions, which had a frontal length of 50 to 100 km and a depth of up to 50 km. The fortified areas included over 4,500 long-term fortifications. Japanese army. waged war in China for 14 years and accumulated vast experience in combat operations, its command staff was distinguished by high professionalism, the rank and file had excellent training and high morale. Back in 1939, after the conflict at Khalkhin Gol, the commander of the Soviet group, General G.K. Zhukov gave a very high assessment of the composition of the Japanese army.

From the memoirs of Marshal G.K. Zhukov:



"Having said hello, I.V. Stalin, lighting his pipe, immediately asked:

- How do you assess the Japanese army?

"The Japanese soldier who fought with us at Khalkhin Gol is well trained, especially for close combat," I replied. - Disciplined, diligent and stubborn in battle, especially in defensive combat. The junior officers are very well prepared and fight with fanatical tenacity. As a rule, junior commanders do not surrender and do not stop in front of the "hara-kiri". The officers, especially the senior and higher ones, are poorly trained, have little initiative and tend to act according to the template!

Perhaps the main drawback of the Japanese army at that time was the lack of large mechanized and tank formations and, as a result, the experience of their use and experience in combating such formations. The tanks available in the Japanese army were light and medium infantry support vehicles, which corresponded in their level to the Soviet tanks of the late 1930s. This shortcoming deprived the Japanese command of the main strike force of maneuver warfare and made the Japanese army very vulnerable when faced with pro

1 Zhukov G.K. Decree. op. Volume 1.C. 270.

566

enemy who had modern weapons and experience in their use  
niya.

The plan developed by the General Staff of the Japanese Army called for exhausting the Red Army troops in a stubborn struggle in the fortified border areas and preventing

its breakthrough into the central regions of Manchuria. Then it was supposed to go on a counteroffensive and start an invasion of Soviet territory. According to analysts of the Japanese General Staff, the Kwantung grouping was capable of holding back the Red Army for a year, during which time it was supposed to achieve a turning point in the course of hostilities and create conditions for concluding an acceptable peace. The content of this plan testified to the striking underestimation by the Japanese command of its enemy.

Nevertheless, the task that the Red Army had to solve was not an easy one. The Soviet Headquarters of the Supreme High Command began preparations for war with Japan as early as the summer of 1944, but practical preparations began after the Crimean Conference was over. The plan for the forthcoming campaign was ready in April 1945. Its content fully reflected the experience gained by the high military command of the Red Army in waging war in Europe. A simultaneous invasion of Manchuria was planned in order to liberate the northeastern provinces from Japanese troops.

China and North Korea. The operational-strategic pattern of the operation was based on two deep and powerful counter-attacks delivered from the territory of the Mongolian People's Republic and the Soviet Maritime Territory, which immediately placed the entire Kwantung grouping under the threat of a deep envelopment. In addition, auxiliary strikes were supposed to isolate it from the main forces concentrated in China and from the mother country. As a result of the further rapid offensive, it was planned to complete the encirclement of the main forces of the Kwantung grouping and completely defeat them. In the future, Soviet troops were to move to Mukden and Port Arthur. At the same time, landing operations were planned in order to liberate from

567

the Japanese of South Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, and in a certain situation - a landing on the island. Hokkaido.

On the whole, the campaign plan was distinguished by features characteristic of the operations of the Red Army in the final period of the war - courage, scale, and focus on achieving a decisive result. A distinctive feature of the preparation of the operation was the effective use of the experience gained by the troops in past campaigns, a case not frequent in the history of the Soviet armed forces. For the operation, military formations were involved that had combat experience that corresponded to the specifics of the forthcoming operation. Thus, units of the 5th Army, which had experience in successfully breaking through fortified defensive lines in East Prussia, had to storm a continuous strip of reinforced concrete fortifications of the enemy in the zone of the 1st Far Eastern Front. The 6th Guards Tank Army and the 53rd Combined Arms Army, which had extensive experience in operations in the mountainous steppe terrain, were introduced into the Transbaikal Front - they were to advance in the mountainous regions and in the desert expanses of the Manchurian Plain. According to the same principle, the command of the fronts was selected - R.Ya. Malinovsky, K.A. Meretskov, M.V. Zakharov and others. The general leadership of military operations in the campaign was entrusted to Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky. During the war, he gained experience in developing, organizing and conducting operations on a strategic scale and, in addition, at the final stage of the war he directly supervised the actions of the 3rd Belorussian Front in the most difficult East Prussian operation. Taken together, the experience gained by Marshal Vasilevsky could only be compared with the experience of Marshal Zhukov.

The preparations for the Red Army's Far East campaign were unusually intense, with the result that the troops were ready to start hostilities - an unprecedented case - a week before the appointed time. On August 7, the command of the Far Eastern group received a directive from the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command on the start of hostilities on August 9. The Japanese ambassador in Moscow received a note from the Soviet government declaring war on August 8 at 23:00. At one in the morning (Khabarovsk time)

568

Detachments of three Soviet fronts crossed the state border and began hostilities on the territory of Manchuria. The main forces went on the offensive in a few hours.

The campaign of the Red Army against the Japanese troops in the Far East was notable for its unprecedented dynamism. It was a blitzkrieg in its classic form. The Kwantung group was defeated in less than three weeks. The outcome of the campaign was already decided in the first few days. Despite the fact that the offensive of the 1st Far Eastern Front, Marshal K.A. Meretskov began in pouring rain, his troops advanced 20 km on the first day. Formations of the 1st Red Banner Army, Colonel-General A.P. Beloborodov and the 5th Army, Colonel-General N.I. Krylova is unexpected. As a result, without artillery preparation, they broke into the depths of the fortified areas of the enemy. Success was achieved thanks to the courageous actions of the assault battalions, which secretly advanced to the border line at night and blocked the key pillboxes. The defense was broken, the main forces rushed into the gap, bypassing the blocked firing points. Having overcome the difficult mountainous taiga terrain, the troops of the 1st Far Eastern Front advanced 120-150 km and reached a large city and a powerful center of resistance Mu danjiang.

Troops of the Trans-Baikal Front Marshal R.Ya. Malinovsky used absolute air superiority and, having suppressed enemy resistance, introduced the main strike forces into the breakthrough - the 6th Guards Tank Army of Colonel General A.G. Kravchenko and the horse-mechanized group of General I.A. Pliev, who immediately rushed to the Big Khingan. On the fifth day of the formation of the 6th Guards Tank Army. overcame the Greater Khingan, which was considered impregnable for mechanized troops. "The path had to be laid through mountains and swampy narrow valleys," the combat report noted. It took enormous efforts, people worked for several days without sleep and rest on the construction of roads, passages, blew up rocks, filled up ravines, dragged cars, cannons, carts, on themselves through mountains, through swamps and sands,

569

kah carried ammunition. The tankers broke out onto the Manchurian Plain, reaching the deep rear of the Kwantung grouping. Mukden was ahead.

Formations of the 2nd Far Eastern Front of Army General M.A. Purkaev, thanks to the active and swift actions of the Amur flotilla, they quickly crossed the Amur and captured bridgeheads on the Manchurian coast, and then successfully broke through the Japanese defenses. As in other areas, Soviet troops blocked and bypassed powerful fortifications, quickly moving forward.

In total for the first. six days of the offensive were

16 enemy fortified areas were destroyed. The formations of the Red Army managed to break through to a depth of up to 400 km. The rapid breakthrough of the Soviet troops through the spurs of the Bolishoi Khingan and the mountainous taiga regions, which were considered practically impassable by the enemy, made a shocking impression on the Japanese command and disorganized the action.

. Viya to repel the offensive of the Red Army.

Between August 15 and 20, the main forces of the Kwantung Group were defeated. In a number of places, Soviet troops met fierce resistance from the Japanese garrisons. The use of suicide squads was noted everywhere. The first attacks by suicide pilots ("kamikaze") were carried out as early as the autumn of 1944 against Allied ships during the Battle of the Philippines. Subsequently, they became massive - more than 2,500 attacks were made. As part of the Kwantung Army, a special separate brigade of suicide bombers (teixintai) was created, and in each division there were suicide battalions, the main task of which was to destroy enemy tanks, artillery, and especially officers. The consciousness of suicide warriors was formed on the basis of the medieval moral and religious code of the samurai warrior "Bushido", which requires unquestioning obedience and contempt for death. The dead suicide bombers were counted as saints.

After breaking through the Japanese defense line and invading Manchuria, Soviet troops began to be increasingly subjected to

1 Cited. In: The Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book 3. S. 395.

570

attacks by teishintai units. Usually they were thrown against Soviet tanks. To repel suicide attacks, a technique was used that had been worked out even at the entrance of the final battles in Germany to fight the "faustniks" - they planted auto matchers on the armor of the tanks, which destroyed the "Teyshintai" rushing at the tanks with their fire.

On August 17, having completely lost control of the isolated groups of troops, the Commander-in-Chief of the Kwantung Army, General Otozo Yamada, gave the order to cease resistance. The next day, the Japanese units began to surrender, but a large number of detachments and garrisons still continued to resist. Then the commander-in-chief of the Soviet troops, Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky gave the order "to go over to the actions of specially formed, fast-moving and well-equipped detachments" with the aim of capturing a number of large cities, bases and airfields. In addition, airborne assault forces were landed in Mukden, Changchun, Dalny, Harbin, Port Arthur and other cities. The daring actions of the paratroopers took the rear garrisons of the Japanese by surprise and made it possible to capture these points practically without resistance. At the Mukden airfield, paratroopers captured the Emperor of Manchuria, G. Pu, with all his retinue. But not everywhere Japanese

troops so easily stopped resistance. The surrender of the Kwantung Army continued until the end of August. A detachment of paratroopers from the Pacific Fleet that landed in the Korean port of Seishin was subjected to fierce Japanese attacks that lasted two days. The resistance offered by the Japanese garrisons to the Soviet landing forces on the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin turned out to be very serious.

As a result of the powerful and swift offensive of the Red Army, the Japanese Kwantung grouping was completely defeated. For the soldiers and officers of the Red Army, this victory had the obvious character of historical retribution.

From the memoirs of scout Grigory Kalachev:

"We ended the war in Port Arthur. How eager we were, how we dreamed of paying off the samurai for the defeat in the first Russo-Japanese War! I remember when we were driving to Dal

571

ny East, everyone read the novel "Port Arthur", there were many publications about this in the army press. And then, already during the offensive, the political instructors kept repeating: our cause is just, this is retribution for all previous Japanese crimes, the restoration of historical justice. So Stalin said in his victorious address: by defeating Japan, we washed away the "black spot" from the people's memory ... And when we returned to Port Arthur at the end of August 1945, where our grandfathers fought and died, the first thing we did was bow soldiers' graves in the Russian cemetery...".

The total losses of the enemy amounted to over 700 thousand soldiers and officers, of which about 84 thousand died and more than 640 thousand were taken prisoner, 4,300 guns and mortars (grenade launchers), 686 tanks, 861 aircraft, the entire composition of the Japanese Sungari flotilla and several hundred warehouses with military property<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, the losses of the Soviet troops turned out to be much less - 36,456 soldiers and officers, of which 12,031 were irretrievable. The loss of equipment also turned out to be relatively small - 78 tanks, 62 aircraft, 232 guns and mortars?

The decisive factor in such an impressive victory for the Red Army was its colossal superiority over the enemy in the latest types of weapons and, most importantly, in the experience of modern mobile warfare. It was based on the interaction of dissimilar forces on the battlefield, the concentration of efforts on decisive sectors of the front, and the massive use of tank and mechanized formations to envelop and encircle the enemy. The Japanese army had practically no such experience, and the Kwantung group operated almost exclusively against the weakly armed and fragmented forces of the Chinese partisans. The emphasis of the Japanese command on a system of long-term fortifications gave the initiative to the Red Army, and the experience of the war in Europe

1I fought samurai. From Khalkhin Gol to Port Arthur / Comp. A.Koshe lion. - M.: Yauza, 2005. S. 341-342.

? See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Military-historical essays. - Book 3. M., 1999. S. 399.

3 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 309,487.

572

Europe has already unequivocally shown that no fortification is capable of stopping the advance of a modern army equipped with all the necessary weapons on its own. In a certain sense, the success of the Japanese army in 1941-1942. did her a disservice. The experience gained in the fight against an enemy with little initiative, who adhered to a defensive strategy, could not serve as a basis for the fight against the Red Army, which went through the most severe "universities" of the fight against the German Wehrmacht, the best army in Europe at that time. It can be said that despite the large number and large number of weapons, the Kwantung Army was still not an equal enemy. This was partly recognized by the Soviet command itself. Evidence of this is the limited forces involved in its destruction. Whereas four of the six available tank armies—the main striking force of the Soviet armed forces—were involved in the Berlin operation, only one, the 6th Guards Tank Army, was used against the entire Kwantung grouping.

However, this does not in the least detract from the significance of the victory in Manchuria. Already on August 9, after receiving the news of the USSR's entry into the war, Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki declared at a meeting of the Supreme Council: "The entry of the Soviet Soyu into the war puts us completely in a hopeless situation and makes it impossible to continue the war." The almost lightning defeat of the entire Kwantung Army, at that time the most numerous and combat-ready in the Japanese armed forces, to a very large extent influenced the decision on general surrender. The act of surrender of Japan was raised on September 2, 1945 in Tokyo Bay aboard the American battleship Missouri. World War II is over.

#### URAL VS RUHR: VICTORY IN THE REAR

1944 was the period of the highest tension in the process. economic confrontation between Germany and the USSR, which by this time had already fully acquired the character of a total

573

foot action. In Germany, the first step towards total war was taken immediately after the defeat at Stalingrad. In February 1943, speaking at a rally held under the slogan "Total war is the shortest war," J. Goebbels called on the German people to "take off their kid gloves and bandage their fist" and move on to "Spartan life". In fact, the imperial propaganda minister put forward the slogan "Everything for the front! Everything for the win." From that moment on, the war for Germany and its people becomes more and more total. In November 1943, another total mobilization was carried out, which gave the front about 2 million reinforcements, which made it possible to increase the size of the active army to 10.5 million by the beginning of 1944. To supply this huge army, more and more weapons and ammunition were needed. and technology. There was only one way out - the mobilization of the entire industrial potential for the needs of military production. But the German political leadership, counting on a "lightning war", was fatally belated with the beginning of the general militarization of the economy. Appointed at the beginning of 1942 as the new Minister of Armaments, A. Speer was surprised to find that only 37.5% of the pig iron produced in the country goes to military needs, while during the First World War this share was 46.5%, production consumer goods decreased by only 3% compared to the prewar level<sup>2</sup>. The result of this delay was a very low level of mobilization of the country's military potential. In 1941, the level of production of artillery pieces and ammunition amounted to only a quarter of the volume of this production in 1918<sup>3</sup>. In 1944, the German leadership took emergency measures to increase military production.

In fact, in 1944 the economy of the opposing sides turned into an independent "theater of war".

. Cit. by: Kirilenko G.V. Economic confrontation of the parties / War and society, 1941-1945: In 2 books. Rep. ed. G.N. Sevostyanov. - M.: Nauka, 2004. Book. 1. S. 346. |

<sup>2</sup> See: Speer A. Memoirs: Per. with him. - Smolensk: Rusich, 1997. S. 308-309.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. S. 298.

574

The outcome of the struggle on the fronts was decided in the rear. Both understood it. sides. The Nazi regime strained every effort, but it was too late. The military-political leadership of Germany was late with the necessary measures by at least three or four years. During this time, the mechanism for the maximum realization of the military economic potential through the redistribution of available resources has already been fully created in the Soviet Union. This meant that the USSR, having no overall economic superiority, produced more weapons.

AVERAGE ANNUAL PRODUCTION OF THE MAIN TYPES  
OF INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS AND WEAPONS  
IN THE USSR AND GERMANY IN 1941-1945.1.

| Products

Electricity, bln kWh 36.8 83.5 1:2.4 Coal, mln tonne 4 and 6  
aa 8

Tanks and self-propelled guns ,and - 8 -.

IN -

Tools a, St. 75 mm) 47.0 25.5 Mortars, thous.  
86.9 17.0 Ms 1:1

Thousand PC.

[Cars | leaks [thousand | 50 |

In the summer of 1944, the German economy provided the peak of war production. The average annual production of the main types of armaments has increased three to six times in comparison with 1941. But here new ones came into force. factors. It was in 1944 that the massive bombardment by allied strategic aviation reached its climax. Under their influence and because of the consequences of the beginning of the invasion of the Red Army into the territory of Eastern Europe, the military economy of Germany began to decline.

1 See: Kirilenko G.V. Decree. op. S. 352.

575

9/6

PRODUCTION OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TYPES OF  
WEAPONS AND MILITARY EQUIPMENT IN GERMANY'.

Rifles and carbines

) | ITS all  
1:16:



Tools of all kinds

mortars

combat aircraft

| 1 Comp. Quoted from: History of the Second World War, 1939-1945. T. 12. M.: Military Publishing House, 1982. S. 200.

In the summer of 1944, another total mobilization was carried out in Germany, during which the draft age was reduced from 17.5 to 16 years, tens of thousands of shops, small enterprises, almost all cultural institutions were closed, train traffic was limited, etc. 2.1 million people were mobilized into the war economy, in order to expand it, the production of consumer goods was halved compared to the pre-war period, and food products were halved by two or three times. The population of Germany fully experienced all the hardships and hardships of a total war. But even this could not prevent the collapse. The German Ruhr suffered a crushing defeat in the confrontation with the Soviet Urals.

PRODUCTION OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TYPES OF WEAPONS  
AND MILITARY EQUIPMENT IN THE USSR'.

Rifles and

1567.1 | 4049.0 | 3436.2 | 2450.0 | 637.0 | Rose Pistols

1506.4 | 2023.6 | 1970.8 | 5834 | 6173.9 8 106.2 | 3561 |  
458.5 | 439.1 | 156.0 | 1515.9 8

E 30.2 | 1271 | 130.3 | 122.4 her

HER

| Mortars \_\_\_\_ | 230.0 | 0 | bd | 4  
aaa  
21.7 19.1 112.1

Tanks, self-propelled  
guns, etc. A huge role in the economic victory of the USSR was played by

help received from allies. It was in 1944 that she

hall was the largest. Diverse deliveries of raw materials, materials, equipment, machines and mechanisms allowed the Soviet economy to concentrate its main efforts

1 See Kirilenko G.V. Decree. op. S. 168.

19 A. Kilichenkov 577

- in the production of weapons. The Soviet Union could afford such a "luxury" as a reduction in comparison with the pre-war level of production of tractors - by 9.9 times, cars - by 2.4 times, mainline steam locomotives - by 28.5 times. In 1944 alone, the USSR received 1,100 main steam locomotives and 129,100 trucks under Lend-Lease, which exceeded their own production by 2.4 and 34 times, respectively. In addition, 591.9 thousand tons of rolled ferrous metals, 18.6 thousand metal-cutting machines were received. In 1944, deliveries of equipment also turned out to be significant - 5,877 aircraft, 3,223 tanks and self-propelled guns, 3,122 guns. The significance of this help was highly appreciated by the command of the Red Army. Marshal G.K. Zhukov later recalled that "the Americans gave us so many materials, without which we could not form our reserves and could not continue the war ... We did not have explosives, gunpowder. There was nothing to equip rifle cartridges. The Americans really helped us out with gunpowder and explosives. And how much they drove us sheet steel. Could we have quickly set up the production of tanks if it were not for the American help with steel? The joint efforts of the allied countries in the anti-Hitler coalition ensured a common victory in the economic confrontation on the fronts of World War II.

#### PARTISAN MOVEMENT IN 1944-1945

◌  
The military campaign of 1944 became for the Soviet partisans a period of full-scale joint operations with the Red Army to liberate the territory occupied by the enemy. At this stage, despite the disbandment of a number of partisan detachments and formations after the liberation of the western regions of the USSR, the number of partisans behind enemy lines continued to grow. By the beginning of 1944, it amounted to more than 250 thousand people. Only in Latvia during the year the number of partisans

1 See: Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book Z3. pp. 335-336. 2 Quot. by: Kirilenko G. V. Decree. op. S. 351.

578

three times, in Estonia - five times! The growth in the number of partisan detachments was caused by the approach of the Red Army and the obvious imminent collapse of the occupation regime. IN

In January 1944, the TsSHPD was disbanded, and the republican and regional headquarters began to control the actions of the partisan formations - on the eve of liberation, it was necessary to activate the local authorities and their structures.

The main goal of the actions of the Soviet partisans remained the same - the destruction of enemy military communications. In 1944, not a single major offensive operation of the Red Army was planned without the involvement of partisan forces. The winter offensive of the troops of the Leningrad Front was supported by 13 partisan brigades and a number of separate detachments with a total strength of up to 35 thousand people. In total, according to Soviet data, during the operation near Leningrad and Novgorod, the partisans destroyed more than 21.5 thousand Nazis, blew up over 58,500 rails and about 300 bridges, derailed 136 enemy trains, destroyed over 500 km of telephone and telegraph lines, destroyed 1,620 vehicles and 28 warehouses.

The partisans' actions during Operation Bagration in Belarus in the summer of 1944, whose actions actually disrupted the transfer of the 4th and 5th Panzer Divisions from the Northern Ukraine Army Group to the Center Army Group, became the most ambitious. The partisans seized and held crossings across large and small rivers until the Red Army units approached, laid roads in swampy areas, brought forward formations to the flanks and rear of the retreating enemy, and themselves liberated settlements and cities. The enemy expected partisan attacks at any time and in any place, and very soon this affected the morale of the German soldiers and officers: "Fear of the partisans brought such a mess that it became impossible to maintain the morale of the troops ..."3. In total, 144 partisan brigades took part in the Belarusian operation.

' See: Kiyazkov A.S. occupation regime. partisan movement in War and society, 1941-1945. Book. 2. S. 285 ..

? There. P. 286. 3

Cited. Quoted from: History of the Second World War, 1939-1945. T. 9. S. 52.

579

reptiles and 80 special units. In the course of combat interaction with parts of the Soviet troops, the partisans destroyed more than 15 thousand and captured more than 17 thousand Nazi soldiers and officers.'

By the beginning of 1944, 31 partisan formations and 81 independent detachments, consisting of 47,789 people, were operating on the territory of Ukraine. The bulk of the partisan formations were concentrated in the offensive zone of the 1st Ukrainian Front. During the summer offensive, 45 cities, regional centers, railway stations and settlements were liberated by their efforts. A feature of the actions of the Ukrainian partisans was the unprecedented scale and widespread practice of deep raids behind enemy lines, during which they transferred their actions beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. Already zi-

mine - in the spring of 1944. The 1st Ukrainian partisan division made a raid on the territory of Poland, fighting 2,100 km. The partisans put out of action 30 highways and 16 railways, blew up 9 railway and 57 highway bridges, derailed 24 echelons, destroyed 75 tanks and armored vehicles, 196 vehicles.

In total, during the struggle behind enemy lines on Soviet territory and beyond, the partisans inflicted colossal damage on the German army. Over the entire period of the struggle, more than 20 thousand military echelons were destroyed, about 2 thousand railway and over 9.5 thousand highway bridges were blown up, more than 65 thousand cars, 4.5 thousand tanks, 1100 aircraft, 2900 warehouses were destroyed. and bases?. But the patriots also suffered heavy losses - during the war years, every seventh partisan and underground fighter died.

#### DIPLOMACY OF VICTORY: THE USSR AND THE ALLIES IN 1944-1945.

The successes of the Red Army and the combined forces of the Anglo-American allies at the final stage of the war, the rapid advance to the German borders were put on the agenda

1 See: Knyazkov A.S. Decree. op. S. 286. 2 Ibid. S. 287.

580

the problem of coordinating common efforts. Three directions became the main ones - the coordination in time of offensive operations against the German army on the Eastern and Western fronts; cooperation in supporting the so-called "shuttle operations" of the US and British strategic aviation, which carried out the bombing of targets in Germany; exchange of intelligence information.

In February 1944, the joint plan "Bodyguard" was developed and began to operate to misinform the enemy in order to cover the preparation of allied operations in Europe in 1944. On June 6, 1944, Operation Overlord began - the invasion of British and American troops into France . It became the largest amphibious operation of World War II and was unique in many respects. After it began, I.V. Stalin wrote to W. Churchill: "I received your message about the success of the start of Operation Overlord. It pleases us all and gives us hope for further successes. The summer offensive of the Soviet troops, organized in accordance with the agreement at the Teheran Conference, will begin by mid-June on one of the important sectors of the front! One of the features of the "Overlord" was the coordination of the actions of the allies with the grandiose offensive of the Red Army in Belarus, which began on June 22, 1944. The Soviet offensive pinned down all the reserves at the disposal of the Wehrmacht and greatly facilitated the successful landing. K. June 17 at the bridgehead are

there were already 19 divisions and 12 separate brigades, they were supported by 11 thousand aircraft. At the end of July, the allied command in France had 2.8 million soldiers and officers at its disposal. The Wehrmacht could oppose them with a group of about 1 million people. This alignment of forces and the overwhelming superiority of the allied aviation predetermined the rapid advance of the Anglo-American army and the liberation of France. |

Collaboration in supporting the raids by American aircraft also turned out to be successful. In February 1944, three airfields near Poltava were allocated for American aviation. By the end

1 Cited. In: The Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book Z3. S. 316.

581

In May, the preparation of the bases was completed. On June 2, 128 B-17 "Flying Fortress" bombers, escorted by 64 fighters, landed in Poltava after strikes on targets in Hungary. Four days later, they made a new raid on targets in enemy territory and landed in Italy. The base near Poltava operated until October 1944, during which time Allied aviation made 18 raids on enemy targets, which amounted to 2,207 sorties, and 1,955 bombs were dropped. The losses of the Wehrmacht, according to the estimates of the Allies, amounted to 230 aircraft, the losses of the American aviation - 68 aircraft. | I

No less eventful was the diplomatic component of the Allied relations at the final stage of the war. By the end of 1944, the "Big Three" had accumulated a lot of issues that required urgent resolution, so F. Roosevelt and W. Churchill quickly agreed to I. Stalin's proposal to hold a new conference in the Crimea. On February 4, in Livadia, not far from Yalta, a conference of the heads of the three powers began its work. The Yalta (Crimean) Conference continued until February 11th. During the conference, the military plans of the powers for the final period of the war were agreed upon, the attitude towards Germany after its unconditional surrender was determined, and the basic principles of a common policy regarding the postwar organization of the world were outlined. In addition to the Big Three itself, the conference was attended by heads of military and diplomatic departments, their deputies, ambassadors and advisers. | -

The "German Question" has become one of the main, if not the key, issues. The heads of state were able to agree that after the defeat of the German army, the armed forces of the USSR, the USA and Great Britain would control their zone of occupation of Germany. The coordination of general actions was entrusted to the Control Council, consisting of the commanders-in-chief of the three powers, with headquarters in Berlin. Separately, the readiness to offer France to take over a certain zone of occupation and participate as the fourth member of the Control Council was emphasized.

582

At the conference, the main goal of the occupation was clearly defined - the destruction of German militarism and Nazism, the creation of guarantees that "Germany will never again be able to disturb the peace." For this, it was planned to "disarm and disband all German armed forces and permanently destroy the German General Staff", "to withdraw or destroy all German military equipment, to liquidate or take control of all German industry that could be used for military production. ; subject all war criminals to just and swift punishment ... to wipe out the Nazi Party, Nazi laws, organizations and institutions; device-. all Nazi and militaristic influence from public institutions, from the cultural and economic life of the German people. In the joint statement of the "Big Three" it was specifically stated that the Allies' plans did not include the extermination of the German people.

The discussion of the issue of reparations was more difficult. The Soviet plan provided for the collection of reparations from Germany not in money, but in material resources. The total amount of German reparations was determined by Soviet experts at 20 billion dollars, of which the USSR, as the most affected country, accounted for 10 billion. Great Britain and the USA, taking into account their victims and contribution to the victory, 8 billion, all the rest

2 billion dollars to countries. The representative of the Soviet delegation stressed in particular that it was necessary to maintain the standard of living of the German people no lower than the European average.

W. Churchill was against determining the exact amount of reparations, but he was entirely for the transfer of German factories to the Soviet Union. This corresponded to the clear desire of the British leadership to secure for their country "to take the place of Germany in Europe as a producer of goods for the small countries of Europe. The interests of Britain and the Soviet Union are moving in the same direction! The position of the American delegation on this issue turned out to be very close to the requirements of the USSR, which explains

1 Cited. Quoted from: The Great Patriotic War... S. 259.

583

It turned out quite simply - the Americans did not need reparations.

Perhaps the most difficult issue at the Crimean Conference was the Polish question. Actually, two aspects of the Polish problem were discussed: the borders of the future Poland and the composition of its government. The Soviet proposal was based on the recognition of the eastern border along the "Curzon Line", which in general

greeted the Soviet border of 1941 and assumed the preservation of the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus as part of the Soviet Union. As compensation, Stalin offered to move the western border of Poland to the Western Neisse River. The position of the allies assumed a number of concessions to Polynsha in the east, in particular, the preservation of its composition of Lvov. But Stalin took a hard line.

From the memoirs of W. Churchill:

"However, Stalin declared, the Curzon line was not invented by the Russians. It was outlined by Curzon, Clemenceau and the representatives of the United States at the 1919 conference, to which Russia was not invited. The Curzon line was adopted against the will of Russia on the basis of ethnographic data. Lenin did not agree with her. He did not want the transfer of the city of Bialystok and the region adjacent to it to Poland. The Russians have already retreated from this position of Lenin, and now some people want Russia to take less than Curzon and Clément co. agreed to give her. It would be shameful. When Ukrainians arrived in Moscow, they would say that Stalin and Molotov were less reliable defenders of Russia than Curzon or Clemenceau. It is better to prolong the war a little longer, although this will cost Russia a lot of blood, so that Poland can be compensated at the expense of Germany!

Ultimately, both Western leaders agreed to the new eastern border of Poland, but opposed the proposal for a western border along the river. Western Neisse. The final establishment of this boundary had to be postponed. Even more difficult was the question of the new Polish language.

Churchill W. Decree. op. S. 526.

government. By that time, the Provisional Polish Government, controlled by the Polish communists, was already operating in the city of Lublin; on January 4, 1945, it received diplomatic recognition from the USSR. On January 17, after the liberation of Warsaw, this government moved to the Polish capital. For several days there was a discussion about the composition of the future Polish government. The Western allies were united in their desire to prevent the transformation of Poland into a communist state and refused to recognize the "Bolshevik Lublin government." Churchill most of all wanted to ensure the representation of the émigré (London) government of Stanisław Mikołajczyk in the new authorities in Poland. The hard-won compromise called for the reorganization of the Provisional Polish Government on "a broader democratic base, including democratic figures from Poland itself and Poles from abroad." The new government was to hold free elections as soon as possible.

The issue of creating a future international security organization was discussed with great success at the conference.

held August 21 - September 28, 1944 conference in Dumbarton Oaks (Washington, USA). Representatives of the USSR, the USA and Great Britain took part in the negotiations. In Crimea, each of the parties sought to defend their interests in the future structure of the new organization. The President of the United States, being the architect of the very idea of the future UN, tried to fix the leading role of his country. W. Churchill tried to strengthen the weakening position of Great Britain. The Soviet leader set as his goal to expand the zones of influence of the USSR.

Differences that arose were also overcome through compromise. The Soviet delegation agreed to the voting formula proposed by the allies, which was based on the principle of unanimity of the great powers, the permanent members of the UN Security Council, which, in response, accepted the Soviet wish to be included in the founding members of the international organizations of two or three Soviet republics

585

(it was about Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania). The reason for this was their painful political and economic importance in the war and the damage suffered during the hostilities on their territory. The result was the decision to convene a conference on April 25, 1945, in San Francisco to announce the creation of the United Nations. US President F. Roosevelt, on behalf of the three powers, was to hold consultations with the governments of China and France on the decisions of the Crimean Conference regarding a world organization.

One of the most important items on the agenda of the Crimean Conference was the participation of the Soviet Union in the war in the Far East. Consent to the entry of the USSR into the war on a "common front" against Japan was given by Stalin at the Teheran Conference. But the American military was concerned about the specific issues of the deployment of Soviet troops in the Far East, their specific operations against Japan, and so on. The Chief of Staff of the US Army, General J. Marshall, emphasized that a large-scale offensive by Soviet troops in Manchuria was required to end the war as soon as possible and prevent heavy losses among American servicemen. The agreement on the Far East, defining the political conditions for the participation of the USSR in the war, was signed by the heads of the three powers on February 11. At the same time, both F. Roosevelt and W. Churchill recognized the Soviet Union's right to territorial increments as compensation for the losses suffered by Russia during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.

The Crimean Conference has become one of the most successful and constructive meetings of the Big Three. It was possible to solve almost all the discussed issues. Political compromise has become the most effective way to achieve the desired goal. Both the participants in this conference and its researchers later noted that the outcome of the meeting in the Crimea was predetermined by the joint successes of the allied armies in Europe and the strict need to continue joint efforts in the war against Japan. Your best diplomatic qualities



during the conference I.V. Stalin. This was noted by almost all the participants in the discussions.

586

The final point of allied diplomacy during the war was the Potsdam (Berlin) Conference, which took place on July 17 - August 2, 1945 in the suburbs of Berlin. The situation on the eve of its holding turned out to be much more complicated than the situation that preceded the Crimean Conference. In the spring of 1945, the Soviet leadership received intelligence information about secret Anglo-American negotiations taking place in Switzerland with representatives of the German military command. This news extremely aggravated the suspicion of I.V. Stalin in relation to the allies and caused an extremely sharp reaction from him. The death of US President F. Roosevelt on April 12, 1945, only increased this suspicion, since the new President G. Truman was known as a well-known supporter of a tough anti-Soviet course. And soon Truman only strengthened his reputation by signing a directive to stop Lend-Lease deliveries to the Soviet Union. The American administration pursued the explicit goal of exerting political pressure and obtaining political concessions from the USSR during the negotiations for a post-war settlement. After Moscow protested, deliveries were soon resumed, but the diplomatic atmosphere deteriorated noticeably. The new position of American diplomacy was readily supported by W. Churchill. In his message to H. Truman on May 12, the British Prime Minister used the term "Iron Curtain", which later became infamous, justifying the need for measures against the advance of the Red Army in Europe. The actions of the Soviet leadership in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, aimed at establishing political regimes controlled by Moscow, did not contribute to the restoration of an atmosphere of trust.

\_And yet the influence of these unfavorable factors was overcome. Mainly due to the pro-Soviet sentiments that persisted in the public in the United States and Great Britain and the great interest of the US military-political leadership in joining the USSR in military operations against Japan. This factor, along with deep promotion

587

The Red Army deep into Europe remained the main trump card in the hands of Soviet diplomacy.

The meeting started on July 17th. This time the delegations were headed by I.V. Stalin, G. Truman and W. Churchill, who was replaced two weeks later by the new British Prime Minister K. Attlee. The ministers of foreign affairs, their deputies and representatives of military departments also took part in the work of the conference. The list of issues discussed was largely the same as the Yalta one.

On the German question, the heads of the delegations quickly reached a common position, confirming a number of fundamental documents signed even before the conference - the Act of Military (Unconditional) Surrender of the German Armed Forces, the Declaration of the Defeat of Germany and the Assumption of Supreme Power by the Allies. These documents were based on the already reached inter-allied decisions on the demilitarization, denazification and democratization of Germany. On August 1, the heads of the delegations signed an agreement on the foundations of a coordinated policy towards Germany, to which France soon joined. It confirmed that the supreme power in Germany would be exercised by the Commanders-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the USSR, the USA, Great Britain and France, acting as members of the Control Council, "each in his own zone of occupation, on the instructions of their respective governments, and also jointly on issues affecting Germany as a whole. The heads of the delegations solemnly pledged to eradicate German militarism and Nazism, forever prevent their resurgence, any form of fascist and militaristic activity, "so that Germany never again threatens her neighbors or the preservation of world peace".

Despite the rapid success in resolving the political component of the German problem, unexpectedly great difficulties arose in the discussion of the issue of reparations. Of all the participants, the Soviet Union was more interested in reparations than others. The Soviet plan provided for receiving half of the reparations in the first two post-war years at the expense of

1 Cited. In: The Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Book Z3. S. 304.

588

ty from the national wealth of Germany. The remaining half was planned to be covered within ten years after the capitulation at the expense of commodity deliveries of German current products. In the opinion of the Soviet delegation, the reparations were supposed to contribute to the economic disarmament of Germany and at least partially compensate for the enormous damage inflicted on the Soviet Union and other countries. The largest percentage of seizures of equipment and materials (75%) was planned for the military industry, the smallest - for food (15%) and transport (25%). In response, the US delegation put forward the idea of zonal collection of reparations, i.e. each was asked to satisfy reparation claims from his zone of occupation. But this option did not meet the interests of the USSR at all, since in the Soviet zone, according to. According to experts, there were no more than 42% of the national wealth of Germany. The British delegation did not put forward their own projects, but expressed extreme interest in stopping the German production of submarines and. missiles, in the elimination of German shipbuilding and a number of branches of the chemical industry. In addition, the British saw the Soviet reparations plan as a danger to the social stability of Europe. Finally, the American delegation

moved forward a proposal to link the problem of reparations with the questions of the western border of Poland and the admission of neutral states and former allies of Germany to the UN.

And again, only a compromise made it possible to get out of the "positional impasse" of the conflicting demands of the parties. The Soviet delegation abandoned the requirement of a fixed amount of reparations established at Yalta and agreed with the zonal principle of their collection. The Allies agreed to the repayment of Germany's reparation debts by withdrawing the corresponding German investments abroad and 25% of industrial equipment from the western zones, as well as satisfying the reparation claims of Poland and the share of the Soviet Union. In the process of reparations from August 1945 to July 1949, 239.3 thousand tons of equipment were removed from 40 factories from the western zones of Germany for a total amount of 81.7 million German ma

589

rok (in 1938 prices), of which Poland received equipment from 17 factories worth 10.3 million marks.

The issue of East Prussia was resolved quickly and practically without discussion. Most of it went to Poland, with the exception of Königsberg and the areas adjacent to it, which, at the request of the Soviet delegation, were transferred to the USSR.

The traditional Polish question once again caused controversy. The simplest solution was the question of the composition of the government, which, along with the communists, included several representatives from the Polish emigration and from the general population. The Soviet delegation, albeit with some changes, managed to defend its proposal to break off relations between the Allies and the Polish government in exile. Much more difficult was the question of the western border of Poland, but in the end the Oder-Western Neisse line was recognized by all participants. The city of Danzig (Gdansk) was also transferred to the Poles.

The Berlin Conference summed up and put an end to the events of almost six years of war in Europe. During this conference, the heads of the parties showed once again that, despite all the profound differences both in the political structure of their states and in the positions of their delegations, a reasonable and mutual compromise is the most effective means of solving common problems. The decisions taken at Yalta and Potsdam laid the foundation for the entire post-war structure of Europe. The experience of these conferences and the concrete results achieved, among other things, created a real basis for pursuing a joint and coordinated course both in European and world politics. But, unfortunately, the post-war development took a completely opposite direction. Large-scale and effective cooperation and mutual respect for national interests were replaced by open and tough confrontation, direct military-political confrontation of the Cold War.

## CONCLUSION

World War II 1939-1945 became the most difficult test for all its participants. Never before has the scale of hostilities been so enormous, and the bitterness of the war has not reached such intensity. Ultimately, 61 states with a population of 1.7 billion took part in the war. A total of more than 110 million people were drafted into the armed forces of these states. Each of the participating countries was faced with the need to mobilize all its resources, to exert maximum effort on all the forces of society. The war has become the most severe test of the effectiveness of the socio-political system of each state. The war covered all spheres of activity of the state and society - from the military-economic to the spiritual and moral. The breath of the war was felt by each of her contemporaries, wherever he was at that time. The war left a terrible and unhealed mark in the historical memory of peoples. Each of them, regardless of whether he won or, on the contrary, was defeated, paid his cruel price. The price of participation in the war is not only direct casualties and destruction, it is also the most diverse, sometimes invisible, consequences in various spheres of human existence. The process of cognition of this price has been stretched for decades and has not been completed so far. This manifested itself, first of all, in determining the most painful component of the cost of the Victory for the public consciousness - the number of victims. The price paid by the Soviet people turned out to be the biggest, the sacrifices made on the altar of Victory were the most

numerous.

Over the past century, the losses of our people, suffered during the Second World War, turned out to be the most

591

lossal. They even exceeded the total losses in the Civil and First World Wars, which claimed the lives of 10.3 million people! The main reason for this was the fundamentally changed nature of the Second World War, during which the civilian population became an object of direct enemy influence.

Throughout the entire post-war period in our country, the officially established number of casualties has changed three times. The first time this number was named by I.V. Stalin shortly after the end of the war. In February 1946, the Soviet leader, in an interview with the Pravda newspaper, stated: "The Soviet Union irrevocably lost about seven million people in battles with the Germans, and also due to the German occupation and the deportation of Soviet people to German penal servitude"? But in November 1961, the new leader of the Soviet state, N.S. Khrushchev gave other data, increasing the number of losses three times - "two tens of millions." L.I., who came to replace him. Brezhnev clarified - "over 20 million people." The perestroika that began in the mid-1980s

carried new historical revelations that also affected the period of the Second World War. On the eve of the 45th anniversary of the Victory, the President of the USSR M.S. Gorbachev, on the basis of studies carried out by that time by a special commission of the Ministry of Defense, provided new data - 27 million lives of Soviet people. In the early 1990s, this figure was refined by correlating the results of two censuses, 1939 and 1959, and shifting them to the required dates, 1941 and 1945. The resulting number of demographic losses of the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War amounted to 26.6 million people?.

The losses of the Soviet armed forces turned out to be exceptionally heavy. During the war, 34 million 476.7 thousand people were drafted into the armed forces. General irrevocable human

1 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century: Statistical study. — M.: OLMA-PRESS, 2001. S. 227.

? Cit. by: Pronko V.A. The price of Victory / War and society, 1941-1945: V2kn. Rep. ed. G.N. Sevostyanov. - M.: Nauka, 2004. Book. 2. S. 387.

3 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 236-229.

592

the losses of the army, aviation, navy, troops of the NKVD and other formations in killed, dead from wounds and diseases, captured and missing amounted to 11 million 944.1 thousand people. Of these, 5 million 226.8 thousand were killed in battles and during sanitary evacuation, 1 million 102.8 thousand died in hospitals; 5 million 59 thousand were captured or missing, the same category includes citizens called up for mobilization, but not yet included in the lists of units of the active army. 555,500 people are non-combat losses of the Soviet armed forces - those who died from diseases, those who died as a result of accidents, those who were shot by the verdicts of military tribunals. The fate of Soviet prisoners of war was especially tragic. Of the total number of 5,700 thousand prisoners of war, about 3,300 thousand people died of starvation and disease, or were shot, which accounted for 57%. For comparison, out of 235 thousand British and American prisoners of war, 3.5% died - 8,300 people. Only 1,836,000 people were able to return from captivity. Taking into account 939.7 thousand people who were registered as missing and then called up for the second time into the ranks of the armed forces, the demographic losses of the Armed Forces of the USSR amounted to 9 million 168.4 thousand people, of which the actual military personnel listed in the lists of military units, amounted to 8,668.4 thousand soldiers and officers. The sanitary losses of the armed forces amounted to 15,205,592 people, of which 2,576,000 became disabled.'

This level of losses of the Soviet people and their armed forces was explained by the huge spatial scope of the war and tension on both sides. So, in 1942, during the period of

greater advance of the Wehrmacht deep into Soviet territory, the total length of the front line exceeded 6 thousand km. The number of armies on both sides reached [3 million soldiers and officers, armed with up to 20 thousand tanks and self-propelled guns, up to 18.8 thousand aircraft and up to 163 thousand guns and mortars. The fighting continued day and night on land and in the air,

1 See: Russia and the USSR in the wars of the twentieth century ... S. 236-248.

593

on water and under water. It was on the Eastern Front that 72% of the total losses of the Wehrmacht fell. The Red Army defeated 607 divisions that made up the main forces of the Third Reich, destroyed up to 75% of tanks and assault guns, more than 75% of aviation, 74% of artillery pieces.

The new nature of the war waged by the German army - the "war of extermination" - led to monstrous losses of the Soviet civilian population. During the war, more than 7.4 million civilians died on Soviet territory. 5 million 269.5 thousand people were deported to Germany, of which 2 million 164.3 thousand (more than 40%) died. in a foreign land. 451.1 thousand of the hijacked did not want to return to their homeland and added to the total number of losses. Taking into account those who died in forced labor in Germany, the total number of victims of the civilian population exceeded [3 million 684 thousand people. In other words, more than half of all the losses of the Soviet Union were civilians. Scientists also calculated the amount of indirect losses of our country, which amounted to the difference between the dynamics of changes in the population during the war years and the rate of its growth that could have taken place in peacetime. This value is defined as 23 million people.

The war turned out to be extremely bloody both for the German army and for the people: Germany. From September 1, 1939 to May 9, 1945, the total casualties of the German armed forces amounted to 13 million 448 thousand people, which was more than 75% of the number mobilized during the war years. Such a high percentage of military losses meant that Germany and Austria lost 46% of the entire male population, based on the statistical estimates of 1939!. The total irretrievable losses of Germany on the Eastern Front in killed, dead from wounds and prisoners amounted to 7,181.1 thousand people, and together with the allies (Hungary - 809,066, Italy - 92,867, Romania - 475,070, Finland - 84,377, Slovakia - 6,765 people) - 8,649.3 thousand people. Losses among the civilian population of the Third Reich in

| See Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Military-historical essays. - Book 4. M., 1999. S. 292.

594

period of World War II amounted to 3 million 300 thousand people  
century.

The fleeting campaign of the Red Army in the Far East in August 1945 ended with the defeat of the Kwantung Army, which lost 83,700 soldiers and officers killed. 640,100 Japanese troops were taken prisoner. The total losses of Japan during the entire war amounted to 2.5 million people.

: The Second World War turned out to be the most destructive for our country in material terms. The war swept through Soviet territory like a colossal tornado, destroying almost a third of all national wealth. The volume of destroyed and destroyed material assets on the territory of the USSR amounted to almost 41% of the losses of all states participating in the war. The damage inflicted on the economy of the Soviet Union by the invasion, in value terms, exceeded the national income of the country in 1940 by 20 times. 1,710 cities and towns, more than 70 thousand villages and villages, 25 Millions of people were left without a roof over their heads. Stalingrad, Sevastopol, Kerch, Novorossiysk turned into solid ruins. Voronezh, Kalinin, Smolensk, Orel, Novgorod, Pskov, Rostov-on-Don were almost completely destroyed. 32,000 large and medium industrial enterprises were disabled. 98,000 collective farms and 1,876 state farms were completely plundered and devastated. The domestic culture suffered a terrible and irreparable damage. The invaders completely plundered and destroyed 427 museums, hundreds of libraries and archives, stole 180 million books, 564 thousand works of art, destroyed or damaged 1,670 churches, cathedrals, temples, monasteries.

The last war deeply shocked Soviet society. And although the Stalinist regime emerged from the war even stronger, serious shifts took place in the depths of public consciousness. Understanding the obvious fact that

4 See: Great Patriotic...  
2 Ibid. S. 294.

595

the terrible days of 1941, the Fatherland was saved by the people themselves, and the Great Victory was the result of precisely their efforts, laid the foundations for future moral liberation from the oppressive press of Stalinism. The ruling regime also understood this. That is why almost immediately after the end of the war, a new wave of repression began. The country was sinking deeper and deeper into the cruel realities of a new war - the "cold" war, which stretched almost

for half a century.

LIST OF SOURCES AND LITERATURE

## Sources

### Publication of documents

"Winter War": work on the mistakes (April - May 1940) Materials of the commission of the Main Military Council of the Red Army on summarizing the experience of the Finnish campaign. — M.; SPb., 2004.

Admiral Kuznetsov: Moscow in the life and fate of the naval commander: Collection of documents and materials / Comp. R.V. Kuznetsova, A.A. Kilichenkov, L.A. Neretina. — M., 2000.

Army General Tyulenev: Moscow in the life and fate of the commander: Collection of documents and materials / Comp.: N.I. Tyuleneva, V.K. Sablin, A.V. Timofeev. - M .., 2005.

The main military council of the Red Army. March 13, 1938 - June 20, 1941: Documents and materials. - M .., 2004.

Air Chief Marshal Golovanov: Moscow in the life and fate of the commander: Collection of documents and materials / Compiled by: O.A. Golovanova, A.V. Timofeev. - M., 2001.

Winter war 1939-1940. Book two. I.V. Stalin and the Finnish campaign. (Transcript of the meeting at the Central Committee of the CPSU (6). - M .., 1999.

Leningrad under siege: Collection of documents on the heroic defense of Leningrad during the Great Patriotic War, 1941-1944. SPb., 1995.

Military Moscow, 1941-1945: Memoirs and archival documents. M., 1995.

The national economy of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945: Stat. Sat. M., 1990.

State Security Organs of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War. Collection of documents. T.-2. - M., 1995-2000.

Revelations and confessions. The Nazi elite about the war of the "Third Reich" against the USSR. Secret speeches. Diaries. Memoirs / Translated from German. - Smolensk;, 2000.

597

Correspondence of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR with the Presidents of the United States and Prime Ministers of Great Britain during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. M., 1989.T. -2.

On both sides of the front: Letters from Soviet and German soldiers, 1941-1945. M., 1995.

Fatal decisions of the Wehrmacht. - Rostov-on-Don, 1999.



Russia. 20th century: 1941 Documents/Comp. L.E. Reshin and others. Ed. V.P. Naumova. In 2 books. M., 1998.

Russian archive: Great Patriotic War: Battle of Moscow: Documents and materials: Collection of documents. T. 15 (4-1). M., 1997.

Russian archive: Great Patriotic War: General Staff during the Great Patriotic War: Documents and materials. 1941T. 23 (12-1,2,3). M. 1998-1999.

Russian archive: Great Patriotic War: The main political bodies of the Armed Forces of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945: Documents and materials. T. 17 (17-6). M., 1996.

Russian archive: Great Patriotic War: Foreign prisoners of war of World War II in the USSR: Documents and materials. T. 24 , (13-1,2,3). M., 1996-2002.

Russian archive: The Great Patriotic War: The Red Army in the countries of Central and Northern Europe and the Balkans: 1944-1945: Documents and materials. T. 14. M. 2000.

Russian archive: Great Patriotic War: Battle of Kursk: Documents and materials. March 27 - August 23, 1943 15(4-4). M., 1997.

Russian archive: Great Patriotic War: On the eve of the war: Materials of the meeting of the highest leadership of the Red Army on December 23-31, 1940. Vol. 12 (1). M., 1993.

Russian archive: Great Patriotic War: On the eve of the war: Materials of the meeting of the top management of the USSR Navy at the end of 1940. T. 12 (2). M., 1997.

Russian archive: Great Patriotic War: Partisan movement during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945): Documents and materials. T. 20 (9). M, 1999.

Russian archive: Great Patriotic War: Orders of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR. T. 13 (2-1,2,3). M., 1994-1997.

Russian Archives: The Great Patriotic War: The Soviet-Japanese War of 1945: Confrontation between the Two Powers in the 1930s and 1940s: Documents and Materials. T. 18 (7-1.2). M., 1997-2000.

gg.: On the history of the military union: Documents and materials. M. 1994.

Russian archive: Great Patriotic War: Stavka VGK: Documents and materials. 1941 T. 16 (5-1,2,3,4). M., 1996-1999.

Russian archive: Great Patriotic War: Logistics of the Red Army in the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945: Documents and materials. T. 25 (14). M., 1998.

Hitler's secrets on Stalin's desk: Intelligence and counterintelligence on the preparation of German aggression against the USSR. M. 1995.

The Soviet Union at international conferences during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945: Sat. documents. In 6 volumes. - M., 1978-1988 ..

The hidden truth of the war: 1941: Unknown documents / Comp. P.N. Knyshevsky, O.Yu.Vasilyeva, V.V.Vysotsky, S.A.Solomatin. - M., 1992.

Memoirs, diaries

Babajanyan A.Kh. Roads of Victory. - M., 1981. Bagramyan A.Kh. Thus the war began. - M., 2000. Belov P. A. Moscow is behind us. - M.: Military Publishing, 1963.

Biederman G. In mortal combat. Memoirs of an anti-tank crew commander. 1941-1945 / Transl. English - M., 2005.

Blok M. Strange defeat / Translated from fr. - M. 1999.

Boldin I.V. pages of life. - M., 1961.

Vannikov B.L. Notes of the People's Commissar // Banner. 1988. №1,2

Vasilevsky A.M. The work of a lifetime. In two books. - M., 1990.

Welz G. Soldiers who were betrayed: notes of a former Wehrmacht officer. — Smolensk, 1999.

Voronov N.N. In the service of the military. — M.. 1963.

Galitsky K.N. Years of severe trials, 1941-1944. Notes of the commander. - M., 1973.

Golder F. From Brest to Stalingrad: Military diary. Daily notes of the Chief of the General Staff of the Ground Forces 1941 - 1942 / Per. with him. — Smolensk, 2001.

Stalin's people's commissars say / Comp. Kumanev G.A. — Smolensk, 2005.

599

Golovanov A.E. Long-range bomber ... Memoirs of the Chief Air Marshal. 1941-1945. - M., 2007.

Gorbatov A.V. Years and wars. — M., 1989.

Gorbachevsky B.S. Rzhev meat grinder. Courage time. The challenge is you live! - M., 2007.

Grabin V.G. Weapon of victory. - M., 2000.

Puderian Heinz. Memoirs of a soldier./Translated from German. — Rostov-on-Don, 1998.

Gusev A. M. Elbrus on fire. - M., 1980.

Eremenko A.I. At the beginning of the war. - M .., 1965.

Zhukov G.K. Memories and reflections. In three volumes. - M., 1990. Zakharov M.V. The General Staff in the prewar years. — M., 1989.

Results of the Second World War. Conclusions of the vanquished / Per. with him. - M., 1998. |

Carius Otto. "Tigers" in the mud. Memoirs of a German tank hundred / Per. S.V. Lisogorsky. - M., 2004.

Katukov M.E. On the edge of the main blow. - m, 1974.

Killian Hans. In the shadow of victory German surgeon on the Eastern Front. 1941-1943 / Translated from English. S.V. Babak. - M., 2005.

Konev I.S. Notes of the front commander. — M., 2000.

Krysov V.S. "Battery, fire!" On self-propelled guns against the "tigers". - M. Eksmo, 2007. |

Kuznetsov N.G. Heading towards Pobeda. — M., 1989.

Lelyushenko D.D. Moscow - Stalingrad - Berlin - Prague. Notes of the Commander. - M .., 1985.

Malyshev V.A. "A dozen years will pass, and these meetings cannot be restored

already in memory "/// Source, 1997. No. 5. pp.103-147

Manstein E. Lost victories / Per. with him. — M.; St. Petersburg, 2002.

Mellenthin F. Tank battles. Combat use of tanks in World War II. - SPb., 1998.

Meretskov K.A. In the service of the people. - M., 1968.

Mikhin P.A. "Artillerymen, Stalin gave the order!" We died to win. - M., 2006.

Novikov V.N. On the Eve and in the Days of Trials: Memoirs. - M .., 1988.

Pokryshkin A.M. Know yourself in combat. - Novosibirsk, 1995.

600

Popel N.K. At a difficult time. — M.; SPb., 2001.

Rokossovsky K.K. Soldier duty. - M .., 1997.

Rotmistrov P.A. Steel Guard. - M., 1984.

Rudel Hans-Ulrich. Pilot "Stuka". — Minsk, 2003.

Ryabyshev D.I. First year of the war. - M .., 1990.

Next to Stalin: candid evidence / Comp. Kumanev G.A. - M., 1999.

Sandalov L.M. Difficult frontiers. - M., 1965.

Hitler's secrets on Stalin's desk. Intelligence and counterintelligence on the preparation of German aggression against the USSR. - M., 1995.

Simonov K. Through the eyes of a man of my generation. Reflections on I.V. Stalin. - M .., 1990.

Simonov K. One hundred days of war. — Smolensk, 1999.

Stalingrad epic: Materials of the NKVD of the USSR and military censorship from the Central Administration of the FSB of the Russian Federation. — M., 2000.

Starinov I.G. Deputy for sabotage. - M .., 2005.

Tyulenev I.V. Through three wars. - M .: Military Publishing, 1972.

Churchill W. World War II. In Zkn. / Abbreviated translation from English. - M .: Military Publishing, 1991.

Shakhurin A.I. Wings of Victory. - M .., 1984.

Speer A. Memoirs./Translated from German. - Smolensk, 1997.

Shtemenko S.M. General Staff during the war. - M., 1968.

Shtrik-Shtrikfeldt V. Against Stalin and Hitler. General Vlasov and the Russian Liberation Movement. Ed. third. — M., 1993.

Eisenhower D. Crusade to Europe / Per. from English. EAT. Fedotova. — Smolensk, 2000.

I fought on IL-2/Comp. A. Drabkin. - M .., 2005.

I fought on the T-34 / Comp. A. Drabkin. - M., 2005.

I fought samurai. From Khalkhin Gol to Port Arthur / Comp. A.Ko-. shelev. - M., 2005.

Yakovlev A.S. The purpose of life. Notes of an aircraft designer. - M .., 1987.

#### Literature

'Anfilov V.A. The road to the tragedy of the forty-first year. M., 1997. Beshanov V.V. Tank massacre. - M., 2001. Beshchanov V.V. Year 1942 - "training". - Minsk, 2002. Beshanov V.V. Ten Stalinist blows. — Minsk, 2003.

601

Great. Patriotic War. 1941-1945. Military-historical essays. — Book 1-4. - M., 1998-1999.

Vishlev O.V. On the eve of June 22, 1941. Documentary essays. — M, 2001.

Military personnel of the Soviet state in the Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945. - M., 1963.

War and society, 1941-1945: In 2 books / Responsible. ed. G.N. Sevostyanov. - M .., 2004.

War and politics, 1939-1941 / Responsible. ed. A.O. Chubaryan, G. Gorodetsky. M., 2001.

World War II: Discussions. Main trends. Results . research / Per. with him. - M., 1996. Gareev M.A. Ambiguous pages of the war. - M., 1995. Gerasimova S.A. Rzhev 42. Positional massacre. - M .., 2007. Gorkov Yu.A. Kremlin. Bid. General Staff. - Tver, 1995. Was Stalin preparing an offensive war against Hitler?: an unplanned discussion. - M., 1995.

Grankina E.I. Scientists of Russia during the Great Patriotic War. 1941-1945 M., 2000.

"Drobyazko S.I. under the banner of the enemy. Anti-Soviet formations in the German armed forces. 1941-1945 - M., 2004.

Another war: 1939-1945 / Under the general. ed. Yu.N. Afanasiev. - M., 1996.

Zima V.F. The mentality of the peoples of Russia in the war of 1941-1945. - M., 2000.

Winter war 1939-1940. Book one. Political history. - M., 1999.

History of World War II, 1939-1945. At 12t. - M.: Military Publishing, 1973-1982.

Kozlov N.D. Public consciousness during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945). SPb., 1995.

Kulkov E.N., Myagkov M.Yu., Rzheshhevsky O.A. War 1941-1945: Facts and Documents. M., 2004.

Human losses of the USSR during the Second World War: Collection of articles. - M., 1995.

602

Meltyukhov M.I. Eve of the Great Patriotic War: The discussion continues. - M., 1999.

World in the wars of the twentieth century: in 4 books / Institute of World History. - M.: Nauka, 2002. Book 3: World War II: Historical essay / Ed. E.A. Kulkov. — 2002.

Nevezhin V.A. Offensive war syndrome: Soviet propaganda on the eve of the "holy battles", 1939-1941. - M., 1997.

Weapons of Victory / I.V. Bach, I.I. Vernyudub. L.I. Demkin and others; Under total ed. V.N. Novikov. - M., 1987.

Pechenkin A.A. The highest command staff of the Red Army during the Second World War. - M., 2002.

Rubtsov Yu.V. Aer evo Stalin. Political biography pages

L.3.Mehlis. - M. 1999,

Semiryaga M.I. Collaborationism. Nature, typology and manifestations during the Second World War. - M., 2000.

Senyavskaya E.S. Psychology of war in the XX century: the historical experience of Russia. - M., 1999.

Sipols V.Ya. Great Victory and diplomacy. 1941-1945. M., 2000. Sukhodeev V., Solovyov B. Commander Stalin. - M., 2003.

Man and War. War as a phenomenon of culture / Under the editorship of I.V. Narsky and O.Yu. Nikonova. - M .., 2001.

Tsurganov Yu.S. Failed Revenge: White Emigration in World War II. M., 2001.

Shabaev A.A., Mikhalev S.N. The tragedy of confrontation: Losses of the armed forces of the USSR and Germany in the Great Patriotic War. - M., 2002.

Shaptalov B. Test by war. - M .., 2002.

#### Reference literature

The Great Patriotic War. Commanders. Military biographical dictionary. - M., 2005.

Great Patriotic War / Comcors. Military biographical dictionary. - M., 2006.V.1-2.

The Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945: The active army. For scientific reference publication. - M., 2005.

603

The seal of secrecy has been removed. Losses of the Armed Forces of the USSR in Wars, Combat Operations and Military Conflicts: A Statistical Study. - M., 1993.

The command and commanding staff of the Red Army in 1940-1941: The structure and personnel of the central apparatus of the NPO of the USSR, military districts and combined arms armies. Documents and materials. — M.; SPb., 2005.

Who was who in the Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945. People. Events. Facts.: Handbook / Ed. O.A. Rzheshesky. - M., 2000.

Lensky A.G. Land forces of the Red Army in the prewar years. Reference Nick. - SPb., 2000.

Müller-Gillebrand B. Land Army of Germany 1933-1945. - M., 2002.

Lists of names of associations, formations and other formations of the armed forces, people's militia, civil departments of the USSR and foreign formations that participated in the Great Patriotic and Soviet-Japanese wars of 1941-1945. Directory. - M. 2005.

Russia. Chronicle of the main events. [X-XX centuries. - M., 2002.

Russia and the USSR in the Wars of the 20th Century: A Statistical Study. - M., 2001.

Fronts, fleets, armies, flotillas of the period of the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945: A Handbook. M., 2003.

Shunkov V.N. Weapons of the Red Army. - Minsk, 1999. Shunkov V.N. Wehrmacht weapons. — Minsk, 2000.

#### Internet Resources

Bir://LaE.gziv.gi/rgodes/Costo.\$Nit! - Electronic resource of the Department of National History of the Recent Times of the Russian State University for the Humanities. Viyor://Iliega.nh.ga| — Site of the bibliography of military history.

Vir://muui tetetBeg.gi/ - Recordings of memoirs of participants in the Great Patriotic War. The author of the project is Artem Drabkin.

Ber://mimmi.robeaNey.g/ is a joint project of the State Duma Committee for Veterans Affairs, the Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications, and the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation.

604

Bir://mu\m u msugu.ty.ga/mag/Lpdeh.Vit! — The site is dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the Great Victory. Appendix to the official website of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation.

Vir://tKKa.ga/ — The site is dedicated to the history of the Red Army in the period 1918-1945.

The author of the idea, webmaster, administrator is Alexander Kiyan.

BER://umi BaSheye4.pl/ — The site is dedicated to the history of the Great Patriotic War. The creator of the site is Valery Potapov.



## CONTENT

|   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| Introduction .....  | both o ao and aa 5 Part [.                                    | "IF TOMORROW IN THE CAMPAIGN ..."                                   | Pushing  |
| back the frontiers of the war .....                               | eeee ino. 1Y  | "And dashing carts will rush" .....                                 | eeee 21 Soviet society on the eve of                           |
| trials` .....   | 47  | Preparation of the Soviet economy for war ..                        | ..... 56 Germany   |
| and the Soviet Union on the Threshold of the Collision ...` ..... | 58  | Part II. THE TRAGEDY OF 1941 Disaster on the Border .....           | .... eee nan 75 Successes and failures of the blitzkrieg ..... |
|   | eee ene   | 102   |  |
| "Typhoon" near Moscow .....                                       | -.....  | about 122 Mobilizing the Potential for Victory .....                | and 148 Gaining Allies .....                                   |
|   | her nein  | 160   | Part III. AN ATTEMPT FOR A BREAKING ROOM Offensive on all      |
| fronts .... ..-   | .. eeee.  | 176   | "Retreating further means ruining yourself" .....              |
| 201 All the Front! oao roque                                      | 283   | Relations with allies: a test of strength .....                     | 299  |
| Part U. RELEASE BEGINNING   |   |   |  |
| "Space operations" of the 42nd: triumph and failure .....         | 310   | "Dizzy with Success".....   | eeee. 336 Victory at the Kursk Bulge .....                     |
|   | eeee nah,   | 374   | Turning point in the war economy .....                         |
|   | eeee.   | its 425   | Struggle in the occupied territory .....                       |
| WE 435  | The USSR and the allies in 1943: a crisis of confidence ..... | 445   | Part U. BACK!  |
| Defeat in Ukraine - wasp  | 457   | Failures in the western direction .....                             | n. . 470 Breakthrough to the border .....                      |
|   | eeee eeee   | 478   | Revenge in Belarus .....                                       |
|   | eeee  |   | nenenne a 487 Campaign in EUROPE :_...                         |
|   | 3: tin Za ta eeai   | 498   | Revenge in Manchuria .....                                     |
|   | eee aienina   | 562   | Ural against the Ruhr: victory in the rear. ....               |
|   | eeee eeene  | 573   | Partisan movement in 1944-1945 tg. ....                        |
| E... ..   | 578   | Diplomacy of victory: the USSR and the allies in 1944-1945 tg. .... | 580  |
| Conclusion .....  | Pronin in   |   |  |
| in `.   | 591   |   |  |

Alexey Kilichenkov SHORT  
COURSE OF THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR

Published in the author's edition Art  
editor L. Volkov Technical editor V. Kulagina  
Computer layout G. Klochkova Proofreader I.  
Fedorova

Yauza Publishing House LLC  
109507, Moscow, Samarkand boulevard, 15. For  
correspondence: 127299, Moscow, st. Clara Zetkin, 18/5. Tel.: (495) 745-58-23

OOO Publishing House Eksmo

127299, Moscow, st. Clara Zetkin, 18/5. Tel. 411-68-86, 956-39-21. Note glade: mlilm.exto.gi E-tai: iiofekzto.gi

Signed for printing 29.01.2008 Format

84×108 / 32. Headset "Newton". Offset printing. Paper type. Conv. oven I. 31.92.

Circulation 6000 copies. Order No. 7309.

Printed with CP technology

JSC "Printing Yard" A. M. Gorky. 197110, St. Petersburg, Chkalovsky pr., 15.

Wholesale of Eksmo books: Eksmo Trading

House LLC. 142700, Moscow region, Leninsky district, Vidnoye, Belokamennoye sh., 1, multi-channel phone. 411-50-74. E-tai: geserNop@exto-zae.gi

For questions regarding the acquisition of Eksmo

books by foreign wholesale buyers, please contact Deep Pocket LLC.

1thetaNopa! Zaz:

petabopa! / ipoezae syzyuteg\$ epoiYu sotas! "Oeer Roske RI. Tsa. oh tey others. ZogeyupzeNog@ekzto-za! e.gi

For ordering books for corporate clients, including in a special

design, please contact Forum LLC: tel. 411-73-58

ext. 2598. E-tai: mrgaKag@ekzto.gi

Wholesale of paper and white and stationery

for the school and office "Kants-Eksmo": Company "Kants-Eksmo": 142702,

Moscow region, Leninsky district, Vidnoe-2, Belokamennoye sh., 1, PO box 5. Tel./fax +7 (495) 745-28-87 (multichannel). e-tai: Caps@exto-zayu.gi, website: ilim.Caps-ekzto.gi

Full range of books published by Eksmo publishing house for wholesale buyers: In St. Petersburg:

OOO SZKO, Obukhovskoy Oborony Avenue, 84E. | Tel. (812) 365-46-03/04. In Nizhny

Novgorod: "LLC TD "Eksmo NN", st.

Marshal Voronov, 3. Tel. (8312) 72-36-70. . In Kazan: LLC "NKP Kazan", st. Frezernaya, d. 5.

Tel. (843) 570-40-45/46. In

Rostov-on-Don: RDC-Rostov LLC, Stachki Ave., 243A. Tel. (863) 268-83-59/60. In Samara: [her o)

"RDC-Samara", 75/1 Kirov Ave., letter "E". Tel. (846) 269-66-70. In

Yekaterinburg: RDC-Ekaterinburg

LLC, st. Pribaltiyskaya, 24a. Tel. (343) 378-49-45. In Kyiv: LLC DC "Eksmo-Ukraine", st.

Lugovaya, 9. Tel./fax: (044)

501-91-19.

In Lviv: TP LLC DC "Eksmo-Ukraine", st. Buzkova, d. 2. Tel./fax (032) 245-00-19. In Simferopol: LLC "Eksmo-Crimea" st. Kyiv, 153 Tel./fax (0652) 22-90-03, 54-32-99.

Small-scale wholesale trade in books "Eksmo" and stationery "Kants-Eksmo": 117192, Moscow, Michurinsky pr-t, 12/1. Tel./Fax: (495) 411-50-76. 127254, Moscow, st. Dobrolyubova, d. 2. Tel.: (495) 780-58-34. The full range of products of the Eksmo publishing house:

In Moscow in the chain of stores "New Book":

Central store - Moscow, Sukharevskaya square, 12. Tel. 937-85-81. Volgogradsky prospect, 78, tel. 177-22-11; st. Bratislavskaya, 12, tel. 346-99-95. Information about the stores "New book" by tel.

780-58-81.

In St. Petersburg in the Bukvoed chain of stores:

"Shop on Nevsky", 13. Tel. (812) 310-22-44.

For advertising in the books of the Eksmo publishing house, please contact the advertising department. Tel. 411-68-74.

Entire libraries have been written about the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people — thousands of volumes, tens of thousands of articles. But this work stands out from the rest. The author set himself a seemingly impossible task - to write a kind of "short course" of the Great Patriotic War, containing all the events of the four war years in the framework of one book. Previously, only Tippleskirch and Liddell Hart had managed to do this. Such an approach allows one to take a unified look at the historical process, without drowning in details, to see the war not as a series of battles, but as a whole, to discern hidden connections and genuine

causes of events...

Two centuries ago, the Napoleonic general Joubert said: "Everything precise is short." This catchphrase can be fully attributed to the book by Alexei Kilichenkov, which, for all its depth and professionalism, is written in such an extraordinary, vivid and fascinating language that it reads like a historical novel - in one breath.

7856991262304